

# Unwilling Heroes

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Summary: An unusual encounter with a Covenant teaches one woman that it is alright to live again. (rated pg-13, but there might be some rated-r parts) R&R if you don't mind.

## 1. Chapter 1

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I once was asked what had happened during an insertion on the planet Icenein. A squad of Elites, including myself, were sent in to rid an area of the Humans, while avoiding the large military installation that the planet was famous for. Well, maybe not famous, but it was still a threat. Any breathable atmosphere was good enough for a Human colony to start growing, and this one just happened to be military influenced. Our mission was simple; land 2000 miles away from a human colony, and approach the Human settlement via Banshee. When we got there, we had a good idea of what to expect, but planned for the worst. We all were briefed before hand, no information was hidden from us on this particular assignment, and I'm glad. The lands were quite savage. Cracks in the ground, steep cliffs, bad weather. Just our luck though, to arrive during a particularly hot, sunny day. Yes, we said the same thing. Apparently our superiors thought that using the daylight to sneak us in close to the settlement and then wait until nightfall to strike would be beneficial to our success. We had been dropped off so while we traveled, the sun would be to our backs, and stayed high so anyone looking would have been blinded by the sun. That plan indeed worked.

However, what we didn't count on, was the amount of security at this

place. We perched for days, not hours. We couldn't just rush in, and time was constantly against us in this one. The more we waited, the more the Human threat started to grow. I was getting tired of hearing their drop ships coming and going. But I easily realized this place had more of a military presence than anything. It had me worried. This was supposed to be primarily a colony with some military influence, but from what I gathered, it was directly the opposite. Night time, however, we did manage to get a good look at the encampment. Large domes and antennae were situated in the middle. There seemed to be five smaller domes surrounding it, and it was only my guess that this encampment wasn't really an encampment at all. From my judging, and the amount of soldiers pouring into the simple radar facility, I guessed it as the size of a Human base, and like all good Human bases, extended under ground.

Our intelligence... was flawed.

But before we could have time to think of our misinformation, our time had come to strike. The Human element was low, and of the three moons, only one was shining. Our best cover yet. This was a stealth mission, so we moved like the shadows, sneaking up on our prey, our black armor blending us into the background quite easily. We stalked many of the Human soldiers, many of which we could sneak up directly behind, cup their mouths with our hands, and then yank the top of the head back, breaking their fragile necks. Human soldiers were dispatched, one at a time, their bodies hidden among shrubs so no one would be alerted to our presence. It's amazing, but for a squad of twenty Elites, not one of us were found out yet. The squad and I all moved closer, getting better looks at the facility. It still wasn't sitting right with me. Just what could this place be? It didn't look like any kind of critical structure. Still, we pressed on.

Jr'Krian, our leader, was the first to enter the building. We managed to get thirteen of us, including myself, into the facility before the alarms went off, and from there, it quickly became a fight to survive. Jr'Krian did manage to sabotage their generators though and backup systems. They were blind in the night, and their distress signals were soon silenced. I imagined that we didn't have a long time to stand around now.

We all fought bravely, even the Humans, given my distaste of them, but in the end, we prevailed. Not without our own casualties though. Seven of us remained, including my commander. I requested to gather information about this place, and upon being given permission, I was on my way. I quickly found out, to my complete surprise, this place was a refuge for Humans, where casualties of their ships had landed. This place was once a Human equipment storage, and now, families, terrified just from the sight of me, huddled together. I had to report this to my commander, as I'm sure distress calls had made it to Human ships by now.

When I arrived back outside, it was eerily quiet. The looks my comrades gave me didn't sit well with me, and I had to ponder if something terrible was about to happen. Just then, my commander spoke up. We all lined up at attention, awaiting our orders. We were to round up all of the humans, and place them outside in a group, which we did quite efficiently. I was wondering what we were going to do about them, and I took a long glance at all of them. They were scared. Almost to the point where it made them stupid.

My commander forced a few of the Humans to turn their generators back on, after a short amount of time for repairs. It seems they were going to send out a broadcast, under his Commanders orders. When that was done, he started examining the group of Humans, finding a pair of the least scared of the group. He pulled a male and female into the clearing, and drew his sword, holding it into the air before letting it hang by his side. He offered a human what looked like a note, and before if I wondered if the human could read it, he started to speak when a camera was operated.

"To the Human populace. We the Covenant," the male spoke, fear growing in his voice, having to swallow that fear into his gut, "have been threatened and killed by your kind far too long. The Gods have decreed your extinction from their perfect universe, and for all Covenant slain in our Holy Crusades, you will witness the extent of our mercy."

The commander took the note away, and immediately ran the male through. I had to turn away. I have to admit, I flinched when I heard the woman cry out in pain also, but what could I do? These were our orders, weren't they? Wait.... My orders weren't to kill the unarmed. This wasn't about destroying a critical facility, it was a statement. But the statement, was not with destroying this place. I realized the Humans themselves were the statement. Something stirred in me, and almost made me throw up. Then again, the Humans had to be wiped out eventually. Hmm... I just wished I didn't have to be around for this time.

Jr'Krian dragged the next bunch out. Three children, begging him not to go through with this, crying for their parents. The other Elites held the parents back, and I watched as they outstretched their hands, trying to clutch onto each other. The smallest one, not even knee high, scooted back when he saw my Commander lift the sword. I swear to the Gods, that sound will forever echo in my head. Not the scream of the child, but the scream of my commander. He slumped back, striking the ground, and if it wasn't for the helmet, I'd be able to see his shocked face and the burnt hole through it.

I lowered my pistol, the realization of what I had just done sinking in, and unfortunately, the realization came after that fact struck home with my comrades. They immediately turned on me, raising their weapons, and I was gone in a flash. I dived behind one of the domes, readying my weapon again, then sprung. Two more had fallen, bolts of colored energy soaring through the air, and striking their targets with a grim accuracy. I spun around, dodging a blast of plasma. The heat managed to obscure some of my vision, my helmet distorting in color slightly from the intense heat. Any closer, and I would be missing the right side of my face. I turned my weapon on my next victim, someone whom I thought was a friend, and watched his body crumple to the ground.

I don't know if it was the rush of the battle, or something else, but I suddenly couldn't concentrate. My moment of recklessness cost me dearly, as I felt a wave of heat strike my hand. I cried out, clutching my wrist, staring at burnt armor and the melting weapon landing by my feet. I moved to the left, circling around the building, and I could feel the remaining two Elites glaring at me, as though their eyes could stop my breathing.

I could have used my sword, I suppose, but given they had long range

weapons, I was at a disadvantage. Today felt like it was the last day of my life. The whimpers of the humans didn't help either. And finally, one more problem came to the surface. A squad of Human gun ships, coming from the atmosphere. I had merely moments before I was swarmed by them. Footsteps again, and I bolted, running right past the cowering Humans, and suddenly tripping over one of their sniper rifles. I clutched at the barrel, shuffling behind a rock as I watched beams of light pass by over my head. I was panting, looking over the weapon, and recalling my days of studying humans in combat. I pull this lever here, and then press this here.... I was renewed with energy when the weapon was armed. I stood a bit of a chance now, but with Human weaponry....

My ex-comrades started to charge the rock. I stood. We stared at each other one last time before I managed to squeeze that tiny trigger. I struck one in the shoulder, the other, he managed to get closer. It was my ignorance of the weapon that caused his approach. I expected a fatal blow, but instead, watched as the unhurt Elite rushed to the humans, swiping his sword violently. I bolted, dropping what I thought was a useless piece of weaponry, and dived at the Elite. We both rolled, wrestling on the ground for the weapon, and I found myself on top, punching and clawing at the Elites head, until I was thrown off, rolling next to the three Human children. I suddenly made a horrible realization. The one I shot in the arm, was completely gone, and the last Elite, was bearing down at me with his sword. At least, I thought it was me. I moved.

I don't remember the events too clearly, but I do remember a very searing pain through my midsection, and I was blocking something, as though taking the blow for someone else. I quickly glanced, spotting the children behind me, and then frowned in confusion. Whatever the reason, it did give me the distance I needed, or didn't need, and I clutched the Elite's head. With a strong twist, I heard the bones of my Comrade's neck give way when it couldn't go any further, and he soon joined the other six bodies on the ground. Of twenty highly trained Elites, only I and the other, J'Kress, had lived to tell each others tale about this fateful night.

I started to get to my feet, pulling the plasma blade out of my mid section, and was glad for the most part, that the wound was sealed by the intense heat. But it was the least of my worries. I heard the ships start to land and the doors open. I clutched what Humans would mistake as the stomach, where my wound lay, and I started to limp off. As soon as the soldiers arrived, I was as good as dead anyway. Best to die on my own, than at the hands of a Human.

I thought I put some decent ground between the Human soldiers and I, but when I looked back, I saw them start to swarm the base, their guns raised and many of them converging on me. I had to hurry. Unfortunately, my wound said otherwise. I fell to my knees, grunting loudly, the battle high wearing off, and the pain flooded through my being. It was too much. I do remember hearing the sounds of weapons being cocked before I fell to the ground and blacked out.

## 2. Chapter 2

The dreams.... They were terrible. Faces of countless victims in the past started to rise and haunt him. They never left him alone. It was like the hell that the Elders have spoken upon, for those that did

not die honorably in battle. Or was it his betrayal? Or something else? The faces.... Covenant and Human alike, ethereal arms reaching out for him, begging for him not to let them go. And now, the faces of the children he had saved, screaming for him to let them be with their parents.

He awoke in a panic, sitting up quickly, though a cry of pain filled the air as he clutched his abdomen. He fell back in something soft, then quickly looked around, noticing something was amiss. He wasn't on solid ground any more, or even planet side. He was... in a medical bay? Clicking sounds filled the air as well, a few grunting sounds being heard from the side, ignoring the sounds as he frowned. He took his time to stare at everything, the alien designs of the metal room, and the four Human marines standing by the door, their weapons already raised when he stirred. He frowned slightly, his head twitching a bit as more memories filled his mind. He could see scientists, hoses, bubbles floating around him. Unknown faces and several pairs of eyes studying him. This room seemed to bring back those images of his memory that he had tried to call upon several times before, with failure.

His attention was snapped back into reality when the door opened, one of the Human commanders stepping in. He paid attention to the metals hanging on his breasts, and could only assume she was one of the higher ups, and that he was officially a prisoner of war. For a while, the Humans said nothing, this... commander having his gaze locked onto his prisoner. She was an older Human, the kind that demanded respect just from being around her presence. She spoke in their alien language, the soldiers lowering their weapons, though at the ready just in case. The Elite simply laid his head back down on the pillow, closing his eyes as he waited for the pain in his body to subside, hearing the Human speak once more. This time, it was in the Covenant language. The alien turned his head, staring at the Human curiously, though spotted a more timid Human besides her, sitting in a chair and holding a computer of sorts.

"I am Captain Alexis Anderson, commander of the Raven's Night battle ship. Identify yourself."

The alien simply tilted his head a bit, and soon realized that little machine the smaller human was holding, was a translator of sorts. He cleared his throat, his guttural language filling the air weakly.

"I am..." he paused.... He really didn't have a name, and when he thought about that, it only gave him a headache.

"I am... whatever you wish to call me... Sir." he spoke, trying to bow his head a bit.

The Captain rubbed her chin a bit, though couldn't help but chuckle, "That's good, Covenant. Remain civil, and you will be treated accordingly. As you no doubt have guessed, you are a prisoner, and my marines have orders to shoot with extreme prejudice if you get any cute ideas."

The Elite simply stared at him and spoke barely in a whisper, "Understood, Sir."

Anderson simply motioned the smaller Human to cut the translator, and again the Elite was confused by what they were saying.

"Major, I want your men guarding our prisoner, and tend to his needs. The circumstances of why we have such a prisoner is beyond me, but this is an important moment for us. See to it that he gets medical attention, if possible, and proper rations of food. I do not, under any circumstance, want to lose this advantage we have." the Captain spoke, walking out of the door.

The Major saluted her Captain, sealing the door behind her, then stood at attention, her rifle on the ready in case she needed it. The Elite took a good look at her. The bright red hair atop her head was the largest identifying mark. Much of it was standing up and all over the place by some kind of gel, appearing as though her head was on fire. Determined yet kind looking green eyes stared back at him, while her young features did nothing to show her experience as a highly trained marine. When Anderson was out of earshot, a private turned to her, confused.

"Sir... why is the Captain insisting on keeping this... thing alive?" he asked, wishing for nothing else but to end the life of the pitiful Elite here and now.

Major Kidman merely cleared her throat in a discouraged manner, "You are to follow orders, soldier. And it should be obvious the strategic element this has. You saw the video feed yourself, Private. This Covenant almost died to protect those people. Don't you want to find out why the sudden change of heart?"

The Private sighed a bit, then nodded. It was true. This creature could offer several answers about the Covenant, and the bigger mystery lay in the fact that he did protect those people down there. Despite all of this confusion, answers were needed, and he simply followed the Captain's orders, keeping watch of the Elite. The Elite surmised just one thing: he was still alive, because of such confusion between them. Hell, he was confused at what he had done. He threw everything away after that first shot was released from his weapon, and now, he had no idea what his future held for him. He simply sighed and tried to get some more sleep.

A few days passed of more of the same. He'd be greeted by the Captain every now and then, and it had taken a while, but he was finally allowed to eat. Human scientists went through his belongings, and after what they found what looked like rations, they were subjected to a few tests to indeed confirm it was food. It also gave them a better idea of what a Covenant's diet was like. Not only that, but the first aid pack was a great help at starting to heal him. He felt a lot better today, and was actually able to sit up. He draped his legs over the side of the bed, not making any sudden moves, and started to nibble on his rations. Fortunately, he was allowed to keep his armor on, but mostly because they couldn't figure out how to remove it. Hell, he would have removed it if they asked him too. But for now, he was finally getting some food in him, and enjoying every bite of the otherwise bland and stale tasting morsels. He idly wondered if Human soldiers had to put up with food so terrible.

He was about to eat the last portion of the ration, basically a small stick of solid nutrients covered with the taste of something good, and once again was lost in thought. He dropped the ration, watching it bounce a bit closer to the marines still guarding him, and lowered his head when one soldier moved closer. He thought she was going to

step on it, and accepted the short meal with a quiet sigh.

"Kidman, what are you doing?" another soldier asked in concern, watching his partner move closer, bending down slowly.

Kidman took the piece of ration, then brushed it off before she offered it to the Covenant. The Elite was confused over the sudden act of courtesy. He wondered if it was a trick, and slowly, carefully extended a hand, taking the piece of food, then shakily bowed his head to the woman. He muttered something in his language, and she merely stepped back, feeling her hands shake. It was a rush, being that close to something as frightening as a Covenant Elite, her squad simply staring at her in disbelief.

"How could you be so reckless, Sam?" the fellow to her right, Lieutenant Panda, spoke in concern. The jokes were quite plentiful, including a few random hugs from marines, and in one instance, a few chutes of bamboo was found in his locker.

"It's not reckless.... Look at him... her... it... it's starving," she spoke and stared at the armored creature before her, "and... I don't want it to feel like it's going to be killed if it does something wrong. It is still a living creature."

The others chuckled.

"The Good Book teach you that?" Simmons, the loud mouth to her left, sneered.

"It teaches a lot of things. Maybe you should give it a read some time," she whispered, leaning back against the door, "enemy or not, this is still a creature of God, and it will get my respect as such."

"Amen, Madre'."

"Dicks... you know I am following orders, nothing more," her voice having changed drastically, becoming filled with a suppressed anger.

Everyone suddenly shut up. They were well aware that she had thrown away her faith a long time ago, and speaking about it, always put her in a foul mood. Losing friends and family in this war did that to a person. The Elite just watched the four of them curiously, and their conversation. He remembered speaking to his squad mates as well, in the kind of lively manner that these Humans were speaking in. He closed his eyes, taking a long breath as he chewed at the remaining piece of food in his mouth. He idly wished he could have some water.

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"Captain, you wished to see me?" Samantha Kidman spoke, saluting shortly after entering the Captain's quarters.

The Captain looked to her, placing a glass of scotch down, and glanced over the condition of the Major, while Samantha gave the Captain a quick glance as well. The Captain always kept her uniform neat and tidy, her long black hair tied back, and her piercing gaze of her hazel eyes.... Green marines always cringed when they looked

into those eyes. She was Captain material, for sure. Just looking at her commanded respect.

"At ease," he spoke, taking a thin cigar and lighting it, "I've had reports of you 'warming' up to our prisoner. Is this correct?"

Kidman placed her hands behind her back, then nodded, "That is correct, Captain. Attempting to establish a bond a trust between the prisoner and I so I may begin to correctly analyze it."

"Analyze it?" he spoke, puffing a bit on the end of her cigar.

"Yes Captain. I'm assuming the only reason you chose me and my squad to guard the prisoner is because of my degree in psychology. Unless the Major is mistaken, Captain?"

Anderson chuckled softly and put her cigar down, "Of course not. You're research into Covenant behavior is quite... informative, and I imagine this chance is one in a life time to accurately report what really makes a Covenant tick."

"Yes Sir."

"Not to mention the strategic importance of knowing how the enemy thinks to help bring an end to this war."

"Of course, Captain."

"Hmmm. I've read your report as well, Major. Says here you wish to lower the security placed around the prisoner so you may further establish your bond of trust. You know I can't tell you how risky that sounds."

"I'm well aware of that, Captain."

"And this Elite. Has he given a name, or any of his motives yet?"

"None yet, Sir. As far as I know, he doesn't have a name. His identification on his breast plate has also confirmed this."

"Hmmm. Possibly a special ops soldier then?"

"That is a good assumption, Captain. But until I can find the complete answers, it is merely speculation until that point."

The Captain simply grumbled, twisting her cigar slowly and stared at the plumes of smoke rising from the ember. A knock at the door, and an invitation later, Colonel David McPherson stepped into the room. Samantha quickly saluted, and he saluted back in reply before standing at the Captain's side. He was a gruff looking man, hair on the sides of his head beginning to grey, though the stars on either side of his collar were rightfully earned, considering his efforts in the war.

"Major, Colonel McPherson will be who we report to in this matter. The Colonel won't be staying on the ship long, unfortunately, as he does have many duties of his own to attend to."



"A pleasure, Major," the Colonel spoke, nodding his head.

"Honor is mine, Sir." she quickly replied.

The Captain smiled, puffing her cigar a bit more, then looked between the both of them, "I was just telling Major Kidman here that I was granting her lower level security of the prisoner to establish a bond of trust. Major Kidman is my finest psychologist on the ship, and I trust her actions completely."

"If I may, Captain?" Samantha spoke, turning to her Captain, watching her nod in approval, " I would like to move the prisoner from the medical bay to one of the empty barracks, so the Med Team can quarantine the area to see if prolonged exposure to a Covenant causes any ill effects. Also, I would like the Covenant prisoner to undergo a sterilization as well."

The Captain tapped her cigar on the ashtray for a few moments, then nodded, "Granted. I do want your squad to maintain their security, however, and for all of you to undergo a full physical. You've had the longest exposure to it." she spoke, sipping her drink before turning to the only male in the room, " Colonel McPherson. I do not want HQ to find out about this until we are satisfied there is not any threat. The last thing I need is my superiors barking up my crotch."

"Afraid of someone else stealing the glory, Captain?" he asked, turning his gaze to her.

"No, I just value my crotch. Major, you are dismissed. And Colonel, I understand you won't be staying long?"

"Unfortunately no. My duties expect me to travel to reach, and I will be staying there for quite some time. However, I do look forward to your reports about this. I'm sure this will be a hallmark in this war," he saluted the Captain, "Captain. Major."

Sam and David both saluted, turned on their heels, then walked out of the door, closing it behind them. They stared at the large bridge, countless people monitoring their workstations, and she caught a good glimpse of the sun setting through the large view port. The Bridge assaulted the senses in white, monitors lining many of the walls and displaying information before Samantha walked to the middle of the bridge. The command point on this particular ship, was much higher than any other point on the bridge, at least ten feet. It made the Captain's job of commanding the crew much easier. Take off was only in a few hours, and before long, the vibrant colors of the sun would soon be replaced by never ending black, and specs of white. She looked at the computer A.I. staring at her image for a moment, then stepped down the steps, proceeding to the lift. Colonel McPherson joined her, stepping foot into the lift, and pressed the button for the Docking Bay.

"I'm told you have quite the military history, involving many hours of combat, and are one of the best at cracking someone. Is that true?" he asked as the doors closed.

She smirked a bit and kept her eyes forward, "I have my moments, Sir."

"Modest too," he said with a smile, waiting for the doors to open for her level, "do you think you'll get to the bottom of this mystery? Why that thing is even here?"

"I hope so," she spoke, the doors opening before she pressed the button for the Docking Bay, "nice meeting you, Colonel."

She quickly saluted before the doors closed, then turned on her heel and proceeded back to the medical bay.

Lt. Panda shifted his weight from one foot to the other, getting tired of standing around all day. He looked to his colleague, Simmons, and simply sighed a bit.

"What's wrong?" he asked, not looking very pleased as well to be here.

"Standing here all day sucks. When is the Major going to get back to relieve us?"

"Hey, no bitching. Or I will put my boot up your narrow ass, soldier!" he spoke, the two of them chuckling at the impression of their commander.

"Yes sir!" he spoke with a grin forming.

"Soldier, I swear I will yank your sac off and use it for hackey sack."

He tried to keep a straight face, but with Panda starting to crack up, he lost it too. Unfortunately for laughter, they didn't hear the door open. Major Kidman just had her arms crossed, and she was glaring at them as if her eyes could kill them. But, she wouldn't dare do anything negative in front of the prisoner. She simply stepped between the two, who in turn almost fainted from being surprised in that manner. They quickly got their chuckles tight lipped, standing at attention and praying they would not be kicked between the legs, as she was fond of doing to anyone undermining her. The Elite just tilted his head at the display. He would have been killed if he made fun of his commanders like that. She turned her head gently, the two marines stiffening further.

"I will see you both in the ring later tonight to see just how narrow your asses are," she whispered, before turning back to the prisoner, not seeing Panda and Simmons pale considerably. The Elite noticed it, however. Sam just moved to the translator, pressing a few buttons before she smiled.

"Good afternoon." she spoke, bowing a bit, trying to impress the Elite, remembering her observations of a few Elite forces, and some of them bowing to each other. The Elite, was impressed just a bit from effort. She even did the hand gesture... or at least, a very poor attempt to mimic the hand gesture.

He tilted his head again, then took her wrist, wanting to show her how it was done. She blinked in surprise, Simmons and Panda raising their rifles, pointing it to the Elite. He cocked his head back, releasing her wrist and opened his hands to show he was unarmed. Sam just swallowed heavily, looking to her wrist a bit.

"It... it's alright. Stand down," she spoke softly, then looked back to the Elite, offering him her wrist again, "he wasn't trying to hurt me."

He hesitantly took it, lifted her arm across her chest, then swept the arm to her right, then did the motion himself with a bow. She studied the movement for a bit, then smiled a bit.

"Oh, I get it. It's a proper greeting, right?" she asked.

"Yes." came the monotone voice of the translator.

She stepped back, then tried it, bowing properly, which in turn was greeted with a similar bow. She stood and smiled a bit, being sure to write that one down for the reports. The Elite just watched her from his seat on the bed, tilting his head left and right, before she crossed her arms.

"So... looks like we're going to have to get you a bit more comfortable. No one wants to stay in this small room forever," she spoke, hearing footsteps of nine other soldiers coming down the hall.

She looked to them, then nodded a bit, lowering their weapons before she motioned for the Elite to stand. He stood, a bit shaky since he hadn't healed completely yet, but was quite tall. At least eight feet tall, and she instructed him to follow her, but not make any sudden movements. He agreed to it, and soon, was padding along after her, escorted by marines as he was led through the ship. It didn't take long to arrive at the barracks.

The barracks weren't the greatest place to be, especially these ones, but it was well lighted, had enough beds for twelve people, and there was a small gymnasium close by too. He ducked his head, stepping through another door, and soon saw the insides of the barracks, looking this way and that, before giving everyone enough room. The translator was placed to the side, and he took his seat on a bed, wondering what they all had planned. Someone cleared their throat from behind Sam, and she turned and spotted the Captain.

"Major, a word?" she asked, moving from the hallway.

She followed, standing at attention when she stopped.

"Major Kidman. We've just received reports of the Covenant learning of our new friend's betrayal. Fortunately we think they don't know where he is, but as a precaution, this entire level is being evacuated for our prisoner to stay here. The Colonel asked me specifically to look into this matter, and also to tell you, that you're going to have to try to be quick in your reports. We fear we don't have a lot of time until the Covenant comes looking for the prisoner." she spoke.

She nodded and saluted, "I won't let you down, Captain."

"Very good," she spoke and saluted, walking away. She did notice a stirring on this level though, and could hear complaints of other soldiers being moved, taking their belongings and starting to head for the stairs and lifts, though would never hear of any of the complaints to her face. Still, she did take a small bit of pleasure

in tormenting them, at least in this regard. Her crew down here needed to clean up anyway.

The Elite simply listened to what was going on, laying back on the bed before he closed his eyes.

### 3. Chapter 3

"Wa - Wa... teh."

The Elite struggled with the word. He stared at the bottle of water in his hand, tilting his head a bit at the Human dialect, especially the biggest word, trying to decipher the bit of words before him. So far, it has been slow going to translate the language on his own, but it didn't stop him from trying.

"Wa... teh..... Wa-teh."

He frowned. He thinks that's what they call it in their language. The door was knocked upon, and lately, he was allowed to have some privacy, even his guards waiting outside of the door helped to make him that much more at ease. The door opened shortly after the knock, and Samantha walked in with a gentle smile. The Elite started realizing that form that the Humans used with their lips, was of pleasantries, and it made him feel a bit more pleasant. She bowed to him properly, and he returned the gesture, before holding up the empty container.

"Wa-teh." he said in a very guttural voice.

"Hello again, glad to see that you're drinking lots of-," she spoke, turning on the translator, then froze in her tracks, "...what?"

"Wa-teh." he said, showing her the empty bottle.

"You want... some more?" she asked, her mind reeling from this beast looking thing speaking English.

She stood, her mouth ajar, slowly moving back to the door as she tilted her head in confusion, her perplexed face being well read by the prisoner. The Elite of course thought that he had done something wrong, and was about to be executed. He simply lowered his head and stared at the floor, waiting for that loud crack and everything to go black. He was surprised to see another bottle of water presented in his vision, and he cautiously took it before bowing his head quickly. As much as he and Samantha were warming up to each other, no one really trusted each other, and every movement he dared to make felt like it was being judged.

He took his time, opening the bottle, then took a drink before looking up to her. She sat down, with a more serious look on her face.

"Well, it's been almost thirty days since you've been here. And I've been growing... concerned about your lack of exercise. I understand it is important, especially for an Elite to be in top physical condition. Am I correct?"

"Yes." the translator came to life, "for health reasons."

"Okay. And now the serious business," she spoke, clearing her throat, "my superiors are coming by in a short while, and they want to discuss the terms of surrender. They are well aware that you can wait a long time, and betraying your own people, you must have accepted the possibility of being killed, so there won't be any unjust methods to bend you to their will. What they are proposing is a trade. You get something, they get something. Would you agree to something like this?"

The Elite waited for the translator to stop translating, then thought about that. Getting something in return for exchanging something. It sounded like a good deal. But the part about accepting death.... He was ready for it, certainly. One doesn't go against his people and expect to survive longer than a few minutes. He took in a long breath, then answered.

"I will agree."

She nodded slowly, writing in her notepad, then looked up to him and let out a long breath, getting the hard stuff out of the way. She simply stared at the Elite, and was about to say something, though she remembered he doesn't answer to any kind of name.

"I think we have to come up with a name for you," she spoke and rubbed her chin, "did you have any ideas what you would enjoy being called?"

"No."

"Well then... hmmm.... How about... Halo?"

"Ha-lo," he growled, sounding out the word.

"Well... yes. So far you've acted like an angel."

"Angel?" he asked, tilting his head again.

"It's... nothing. Would you mind being called that?" she asked hopefully.

"No."

"Halo." she spoke, then offered her hand, "my name is Samantha."

He stared at her hand dubiously, then looked up to her, "You have already told me your name."

She frowned a bit at how straightforward he always was. She leaned forward, taking the larger hand of the alien, then placed it into her hand, making him clench her hand gently.

"This is how we Humans greet each other," she spoke, shaking hands with the Elite.

He tilted his head a bit, then shook her hand, being careful not to hurt her. She released his hand, then smiled and nodded.

>"Good. We just have to work on form, but I think you'll do fine greeting people."<p>

He tilted his head again, though slowly nodded his head, imitating her movements from before.

"And, I see you've been studying the Human language, English," she spoke, lifting the empty water bottle.

"Wa-teh." he spoke in his deep voice.

"No no no. Wa-ter. Try to pronounce the rrrrrrrrrrrr."

Halo frowned a bit, then cleared his throat.

"Wa-tehhhhhhhr."

"Better," she said and moved a bit closer to him as a smile formed on her lips.

She didn't know if it was the two of them opening up, or if she found herself calling upon some natural maternal instincts to a newborn trying to understand the ways of the world, but she was starting to feel comfortable around him. Which was strange, according to everyone else. Major Kidman would have been the first to lead a charge to wipe out any Covenant forces, yet here she was. She kept telling herself she was just following orders, trying to closer to him, but her squad could see her starting to enjoy being around him. They were glad to see her starting to smile again.

Her concentration was broken as she heard another knock at the door. It opened, and in walked the Captain, a cigar in her lips as she crossed her arms, staring at the scene, and wondering if she approved of her Major standing that close to the Covenant. She cleared her throat a bit before exhaling a long breath of smoke.

"Major, can I see you for a moment?" she asked, then stepped outside.

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The mess hall was fairly packed, considering its size. A lot of the troops assigned to this level had known about Halo by now, and they were confined to this deck to help keep them quiet about it. The last thing the Captain needed was to let everyone on board know that there is a dangerous prisoner on board. Captain Anderson was already seated, puffing on another cigar before she heard the doors open. Major Kidman entered first, and soon Halo stepped in after her, his hands held before him as a pair of metal cuffs secured his wrists in front of him. He was still a prisoner here. Kidman's squad entered last into the room filled the marines assigned to watch over the prisoner, all of them staring at him as he was led to the single chair before the Captain, and the highest ranking members of her crew. Kidman Saluted.

"At ease, Major," the Captain spoke, watching her take a seat next to her, then cleared her throat before opening a leather bound note book.

"Does the prisoner, here fore be named as Halo, understand that this is not a trial, but instead a hearing discussing your terms of

surrender?" the Captain asked, looking over her notes she made previously last night.

"I understand." came the translated voice, causing Halo to tilt his head slowly.

"We're here today at 18:00 hours to discuss the prisoner's terms of surrender. Prisoner in question: Halo. Species: Covenant Elite."

Katrina nodded to the Captain, recording this entire hearing while observing the alien creature. Halo simply sat at attention, wary, but showing respect none the less to the Captain, the decider of his fate.

"Prisoner Halo may make first requests." Anderson spoke, leaning back.

Halo closed his eyes, taking in a long breath. When the translator finished speaking to him, he thought about what he wanted.

"I have three requests. I would like to have Major Samantha Kidman as my caretaker as being your prisoner. I would like to have a bit more freedom to remain active both mentally and physically. Finally, I request asylum," Halo spoke, then bowed low at the asylum part.

Hushed whispers started to fill the air. A Covenant defecting? The Captain looked rather surprised at this as well, but kept her composure, clearing her throat and motioning everyone to be quiet. She flared her eyebrows a bit, sliding the cigar out of her lips, and turned it in her fingers as she let her mind absorb what the Covenant was asking. Katrina as well, was quite surprised about this sudden change, yet her uneasiness about even having the Covenant on board was well documented. She couldn't stop thinking that this was some kind of trick, and the Captain shared a few of her thoughts. Samantha, on the other hand, was expecting this. Long talks with Halo, or as much as they could, made her believe that killing another Covenant, was an act of betrayal to their Gods, and betraying the Gods, were the highest crime one could commit. She understood why he would want to be under the care of Humans. They, gave him a chance to live. The Covenant, would have happily killed him by now.

The Captain merely took in a long breath, rubbing her chin as she placed her cigar down, contemplating the request. It had it's benefits, and of course, downsides. A small battle raged in her mind, trying to figure out if the good outweighed the bad. She cleared her throat.

"Two of the three requests I can accept completely, but the third.... I will need to have time to think about." Anderson spoke, looking to Halo.

The Elite nodded slowly upon hearing that.

"Now, for my requests. It should come as no surprise, but I do wish to have information regarding the Covenant. I would like to know common tactics, as much about their technology as possible, and information regarding your physiology. Being trained in emergency first aid, as I assume all Elites of your rank are, I also expect you

to participate in weekly physicals and studies."

"Understood, Captain." he spoke, staring at her. Probed by Humans... that was a switch.

"And you do understand, that such an arrangement between us, is something to be used strategically. You can get into places that we can't without a fight. You can give us something invaluable. Initiative. You do understand that my terms, one way or another, will put you in harm's way, and you will be expected to follow the squad leaders to the tee, and more than likely have to take more of the lives of your brethren?"

"I understand." Halo spoke, rather dismayed.

Again hushed whispers filled the air. None of the marines could understand this. A Covenant ready to fight against his own people? The Captain, knowing that Earth would never grant this Covenant asylum, she decided to offer something that was well within her power, though not once used in the course of this war.

"Well... given the extremity of the situation, I do believe I have the authorization to offer you to defect to the Raven's Night, and accept you as a member of the crew," she spoke, the whispers filling the air again. She raised her hand, everyone hushing, "given the circumstances, I see no reason why not to offer you a place on the ship, and you have no reason to betray us. Though understand, you will continue to be guarded by Major Kidman here, and you will continue to be watched closely."

Halo nodded slowly, closing his eyes, "I understand, Captain."

"I know it sounds like a shitty deal, but you get to live," she spoke, closing the binder before she looked back to Halo, "when the Major deems you are fit to do so, I expect you to be reporting for duty. Everyone on this ship pulls their own weight, and you will be no exception."

Halo looked back up to her, then bowed his head slowly, "Understood, Captain."

"Dismissed," she spoke, standing and saluting everyone that was sitting in the conference room.

#### 4. Chapter 4

"Come on. Is that all you got? Can you hit harder than that?"

Samantha weaved left and right, shuffling her feet as she sparred with her opponent in the ring. Her bright red gloves occasionally floating through the air, sweat glistening over her body as she landed a few blows.

It's been a long few months already. Halo had complied with everything the scientists have asked, what the Captain has asked, and what Sam has asked. She even managed to get an ongoing psychological report going on Halo. From what she could tell, he was one depressed Elite. Much of his memory was gone, and the parts of his memory that



did remain, gave him nightmares. She wondered what an Elite, at the top of his game, could go through to spark such changes in him, changes that went completely against their teachings and defect to what the Elder's have branded as abominations.

Their teachings.... She remembered the briefing quite well. Jackals, Hunters, Elites, Grunts. Their ranks, how they operated, and why this was started in the first place. Humans were a plague to their Gods. An abomination that needed to be cleansed at any cost. She didn't have a clue why, nor did Halo. He knew for a fact, that his race would follow the words of the Elders, for their word was that of a God, or at least as close to one as possible. It was a holy crusade, something that every Covenant had taken into their very being. Even what their race was called: Covenant. It only fit the image of fanatics, and confirmed everything that the Humans had already assumed about them. But why go against ones teachings, brought up from childhood to be firmly rooted in these very teachings that ruled their entire race? And why Halo, of every Covenant out there? Halo was almost the best, his black armor signified this, at least in the Elite ranks. Black meant dedication to the Gods themselves. Unraveled in their mindset. Yet... here he was. It confused the hell out of her, and the fact that Halo didn't have any knowledge about his past, disturbed her. He suffered from some horrible nightmares, crying out some nights about a terrible flood, and woke up in a panic. When asked about it, the thoughts quickly faded, and he was as clueless as anyone.

It was almost literally, the universe's biggest mystery, staring back at her... wearing bright blue boxing gloves... and trying to dance around. She tried her best not to laugh.

The crowd of a dozen or so spectators cheered, waving their hands in the air. She landed another heavy blow, the large body of the Covenant, Halo, falling to the mat. Humans and their sports.... He cursed in his mind, shaking his head a bit before he got back up. Two months aboard this ship, Halo soon found out that Samantha loves boxing, and she was quite proficient at it.

She weaved again, a completely amateur blow missing her face by a safe amount, twisting her body to get in a good blow to Halo's midsection. He was fortunate that he had healed, and in a good amount of time, or else he would have been on the ground clutching at his abdomen. He moved back, getting a breather, and watched as Samantha taunted him. He tilted his head a bit, lifting his hands as instructed. Watch the shoulder, not the hand. Mind the footwork. Weave, and then strike!

Samantha oofed as she felt a good blow strike her abdomen, just yanking her head back to avoid a strike to her jaw. She hopped back, smacking her gloves together and chuckled.

"That's good. That's the way," she taunted, weaving again, having to use all of her reach just to strike Halo across the face. He stumbled, and was met with another punch, sending him to the mat. He caught his breath, staring at the mat. Girl's got a mean hook, he thought, wiping the edges of his mouth before he stood. He was wondering why everyone was trying to discourage him getting in the ring with her, and now he understood why. She's simply mean. Not what you'd expect from a Bible lover. But then again, no bible lover hit this hard.

Halo weaved once more, trying to imitate the Human before him. He avoided a few expert swings, then got her once more. Sam's squad was of course, on her side, but the other spectators were cheering for the Covenant, of all races. This was all in the name of fun, naturally, but that uneasiness that came with supporting your enemy race was in the air. Still, they couldn't let someone get the snot beat out of him without some kind of cheering. In Halo's defense, he didn't want to really try to hit her. He was much stronger than a Human, and he could have really hurt her. At least that's what he thought.

Halo cried out once more, having a blow land on what would be his chin. He hit the mat and groaned, holding his face as the referee started counting out loud. He waved off any kind of help, letting the count reach ten, and he had lost the match. Sam started to help him to his feet, patting him on the back before she raised her fists in victory, everyone cheering her for the well earned victory, and already she was taunting everyone with the words 'who's next'. Halo merely caught his breath. It was like his boot camp, being beat on like that, and even with padded fists, he still felt the sting from every blow. He was going to ache for a long time after this.

Climbing out of the ring, he had help getting his gloves off. It felt good to flex his hands after having them restrained in such a manner, and he was promptly given a bottle of water, which he drank greedily. He turned as his name was called out, and he spotted Samantha, giving him the thumbs up. He frowned a bit, trying to make sense of it, then mimicked her motion. He soon did the same, and she cheered before somehow getting Panda in the ring. Halo merely watched the bout, and it was then he saw just how vicious Sam really was. The third round, and Panda was almost knocked silly. He could see the passion she had in combat, that fury, that utter bliss. It was something he once had enjoyed, shared even, that passion. That fateful day... why was he dispatched to that colony? He couldn't figure it out. But in a way, he was glad. He was starting to feel more and more accepted here. He started to grasp the language they used, making out words, and some written characters of their language as well, but more importantly, Samantha made him feel like he was part of the team now. Just part of the guys.

Halo merely sat back in his seat, taking a large tablet, pressing the screen and started glancing over the words that had appeared. He had begun to memorize the language, and his grasp of the written version of the language was starting to get easier, though he still needed help with many of the words. Samantha flopped down besides him, wiping her forehead with a towel, and looked at the tablet before she started to undo the tape around her hands.

"What'cha reading?" she asked, looking over.

Halo frowned a bit, sounding out the word, "Ne... Neus." he replied, glancing to her briefly before looking back at the tablet.

Something about war, horrible creatures. He sighed a bit, placing it on the table before he watched everyone. Sam soon invited Halo to the recreation room just next to the gym, leading him by the hand, and he could swear she was excited to have this time on leave. That also included Halo, who was unofficially part of her squad. They were all

enjoying themselves, having small parties and whatnot. The entertainment room was quite interesting to be in. A very large plasma screen displayed interesting pictures while someone turned on some music, further lightening the mood. Halo was trying to decide if the aural atmosphere was good, or if it hurt his ears.

Soon everyone was dancing, but his gaze was on the large screen. It showed a few actors doing what he was doing in the gym, but they were using their legs, shouting bird like cries. He liked the way they moved, never having thought a Human could move in such fluid or acrobatic ways. He watched the movie until the end, quite pleased about it. And then the news came on. He couldn't understand what was happening, but it depicted the Humans on their planet, Earth, struggling against natural disaster. Highly combative, like his people, but how they banded together to face any kind of threat. Complete strangers ensuring the survival of another. It was different in his home. The strong lived, the weak didn't last long. It was refreshing to say the least, and it gave him a renewed look on the race. Why is it the Elders wanted the destruction of the Human race?

## 5. Chapter 5

"Hey there. Rise and shine." Samantha spoke, nudging the sleeping Covenant's shoulder.

He was shaking his head slowly, a slight sneer on his face as he frowned. The dreams, those nightmares, once again begun to haunt him. Samantha frowned a bit, realizing what he must be going through, and despite all of her training and degrees, she couldn't diagnose the problem, and none of his memories were coming to the surface. She only wished to see what he was seeing. She just stayed near him, rubbing his shoulder, and took the time to dance her fingers along the interesting texture of the creature before her. Strong muscle covered in a hint of chitin. A hidden power that could break any man, yet his touch was so gentle. She took the moments to look over his naked body. He was comfortable without such garments, and there wasn't any kind of clothing for him to wear. The ideas of him wearing what was akin to a robe was quickly dismissed. He was adamant about not wearing anything resembling the Elders. It was highly against his religion. As much as Samantha was worried about his obedience to their religion, he was quick to explain that he believed in his Gods, not the Elders, and would continue to follow his religion, and until recently, it had always been in private. He had long given up his armor, retiring it to the Captain's quarters, and not once had he contemplated wearing it again.

When Halo woke, Sam was almost asleep on his shoulder. She lifted her head with a startled look to her face, and watched as the Covenant blinked a few times, focusing on his surroundings, then gazed to Samantha, who was very close. He sat up, tilting his head in confusion.

"What is... wrong?" he asked in his deep, gravelly voice.

"Huh? Oh... nothing. You were having your dreams again, and I couldn't help but feel concerned." she spoke shyly.

He nodded slowly, then yawned, his mandibles stretching out wide,

before he frowned and rubbed his head. It had come to the point where he could carrying on a conversation without the need of a translator near by, having become more accustomed to speaking English. It was difficult, but definitely not impossible. Language consisted of imitating different sounds, and Halo had proved that a Covenant could speak the Human's primary language when given enough practice.

"Bad sleet," he barely pronounced, closing his eyes and taking in a long breath.

"Oh, well... maybe this will help cheer you up?" she asked, presenting him with a box, "the Captain requests that you join her on the bridge."

He raised his eye ridges a bit, "Me? Walk... through ship... like this?" he asked, shaking his head a bit. The Captain was beginning to accept him on her ship, but he was sure the rest of the crew would erupt in panic if they saw a Covenant stroll down the halls.

"Just open it. Major's orders," she spoke, leaning against him as he fiddled with the box.

He removed the lid, sliding a bit of tissue paper out of the way, and stared at a wrist watch... that didn't tell time. Which was good, because he still had trouble making sense of the numbers for the moment. He took it out of the box, inspecting it left and right, and immediately Samantha placed it around his left wrist.

"There you go," she said happily.

He didn't trust this part of her... the hyper active part that she's been known for when good things happen... or when she had too much to drink. Something almost always exploded in the form of a practical joke. She did say something about Christmas also. Was this the day? If it was... he didn't get her anything. That was Human tradition, well, for most of their cultures, at least. He didn't have anything like that back home. Giving and receiving gifts wasn't a custom they were used to celebrating every year like the Humans had.

"What is... thing?" he asked, frowning a bit more as he tried to contemplate it.

"This, is a hologram generator. What it does, it takes advantage of our your stealth camo, and inserts the image of a Human male where you are. It's a very ingenious method, something the Tec's came up with for impersonating Covenants. I asked them if it could be reversed. So, there you have it. Human in a box," she said gleefully, "you can walk all around the ship with the Captain's approval with this on."

"But... with... escort?"

"Well, hanging out with me isn't so bad, is it?"

Halo didn't know what to think. He knew the Humans were quite adept at technological feats, but he didn't dream that they could reverse engineer Covenant weapons. He removed it, looking over it this way and that, then turned it over. He was surprised to see some Covenant metal on the underside as well. He turned to Sam and frowned in curiosity.

"Oh, we used some of your own stealth parts to make this. That way it is guaranteed to work." she spoke, watching him put the watch back on, "going to try it out?"

"Y-yesss." he replied, trying to get rid of that hiss sound in his words, then slowly stood.

Sam marched him over to a mirror, and she showed him where to press. He tilted his head a bit, moving a hand closer, then pressed the button. He looked into the mirror and did a double take. In the mirror, wasn't the eight foot killing machine known as a Covenant. Instead, there rested a six foot tall human, dressed in uniform. His features were fair, elegant. His hair wasn't quite so long as Samantha's, but it was a nice black and combed back. As far as he could tell, he looked medium in build, like every other marine aboard the ship. He should be able to blend in perfectly. After giving himself a very scrutinizing look, he looked to Sam and nodded gently.

"So, you like?" she asked, walking behind him.

Again he nodded.

"Come on. The Captain is dying to meet you," she spoke, then grabbed his hand, tugging him along.

He looked uncertain, stumbling around, or at least that's what it looked like with the hologram. He'd have to work on moving more human like soon, or risk blowing his cover. He couldn't help but think though... what if the Covenant got hold of this technology?

"Sssam. How many know... about this?" he pointed to the watch.

"Well, the Techs, the Captain. We, after some test data from you, might approach the UNSC about manufacturing this for our troops. That'll give us the edge we need."

Halo frowned a bit, then shook his head.

"Don't understand... if Covenant gets technology..."

Sam slowed to stop, letting go of Halo's hand before she lowered her gaze, "I didn't even think about that," she admitted, shaking her head as she thought about the consequences. Covenant impersonating Humans, boarding ships, discovering the location of Earth, "maybe it's best that we don't use this technology where it can fall into the wrong hands... for our own sake. It'll just be another gadget that could have turned the tables but was a risk to us."

"I understand. Human can not pass as Covenant... not by scent."

She huffed softly, though nodded her head very slowly, "I... suppose you'd be the expert about that. Why don't you talk with the Techs? Maybe try to figure out something that could save lives?"

"Human lives?"

"Well... yes," she replied, confused at the sudden concern for other

Covenant.

Halo thought about what he said, then closed his eyes briefly. He was searching for the words, noting Sam's confusion about his attitude now, then looked to her.

"I'm done combat," he simply spoke, looking back down the hall, and at everyone walking around, maintaining the ship, calculating strategies, or just basically doing their jobs, "I feel... I have helped you enough to kill my people. I am a traitor... and my religion... I went against it by aiding in the killing of my people. No more killing... for me."

Sam blinked a bit, though slowly nodded and patted his back, "I know it is hard, but... thank you for everything that you've done. If only I had more friends like you."

Halo smiled slightly at that, then nodded and motioned her to lead the way. Samantha had to take a Covenant smile with a grain of salt. He did try, but to her it looked more like a grimace than anything. It was the thought that counted. She continued on her way, greeting and saluting others when she had the chance, and Halo soon noticed to do the same. He had the badges of a Sergeant on, and according to their military, you had to salute just about everyone... at least that's what he came to understand. Samantha informed him that he didn't have to salute anyone unless a higher ranking officer saluted him first. Boarding a lift and many footsteps later, Halo stopped and looked around, like he was suddenly spooked.

"What's wrong?" she asked, watching him look over his shoulder.

"Wrong...." his deep voice spoke, trying to be just above a whisper, when suddenly the ship shook a bit.

'Attention, the Sword of Damocles has boarded successfully. Personnel assigned to boarding are required to take their stations.'

Halo looked up to the ceiling, tilting his head at the alert. He had heard the voice several times in the past, during his stay here, but he never really known who spoke. Perhaps he would meet what sounded like a her at the bridge.

"Oh, that. Don't worry about that, Halo. We were expecting to dock with the Damocles today," she checked her watch, "hmmm, thirty minutes ahead of schedule. Glad to see they cleaned up with the Covenant fighters rather quickly. We could still make the bridge before the Captain needs to greet the Colonel."

He nodded slowly, running over thoughts in his mind. He couldn't shake the feeling of paranoia over him. But then again, aside from his level, he really didn't know what was going on above deck either. The Damocles, he forced himself to believe, was here on routine. His paranoia was acceptable, however. Betraying the Elders, and billions of followers who promptly killed any would be traitors, did have that effect. In many cases, he felt as though it was just him against all of his people. He was right.

The two walked through the doors into the bridge, Major Kidman saluting the Captain, while Halo fidgeted a bit, quickly saluting as

well. The Captain chuckled softly, returning the gesture.

"At ease. Both of you," she spoke, motioning them into her private quarters.

Halo stepped inside shortly after Sam, remaining at attention, and couldn't help but look around. Most of the walls were lit up with star charts, and diagnostic programs of the ship. Behind the Captains desk was a large screen, like the one he always looked at in the recreation room, and finally off to the side, was a bedroom specifically for the Captain. She needed to always be available in case of an emergency.

Captain Anderson took her seat in the large leather chair behind the desk, then offered the two to sit down.

"So, Halo. I'm glad to see the technology is working well. How are you finding it?" she asked, pouring three glasses of something called Scotch.

"Seems... to.. be working... Ca... Cap- tiennnn." he frowned as he struggled with the language once again. Sam was going to bring up the disadvantages of letting the Covenant discover this technology at a later time.

She merely smiled, offering him a glass, "That is good. And I must say, that I am rather impressed by your grasp of the language. Some more practice and you should be able to carry on a conversation with no real trouble. Though I'll have my Techs look into taking that growl out of your voice.," she spoke, watching Halo take the glass and nod a bit. He hoped he wouldn't have to do anything involving going under the knife to help his growl.

He lifted it to his mouth, then took a sip. It was a humorous sight. Lifting the glass well above the Human images head, the liquid seemingly disappearing into thin air. When he was done, he tried not to cough, never having drank anything so... vile or potent in his life, and felt like he was going to be sick. Sam grinned a bit, sipping her drink, while the Captain leaned back in her chair, staring at Halo coughing ever so slightly. It was hard for her to believe, that a Covenant could act so innocent, and survive under the care of Humans. She thought it was the right move not treating him like a prisoner, but instead like a member of her crew. His efforts in strategy helped countless other battleships to victory. His surrender of many bodily fluids, mostly his blood though, gave a better understanding of the physiology of a Covenant, and then there was the capability for intelligence. Halo learned and used many new skills aboard the Raven's Night. English would have to have been the biggest accomplishment. But she also found that he had a knack for repairing things, which she put to good use.

"Oh, Halo. My Chief Engineer says that your assistance has been very appreciated. How do you like working with Chief Enzo?" she sipped her drink.

Halo thought about that, making kind of a face, "He's... obnoxious, Cap... tien. But otherwise... good."

"Do you like working in Engineering?"

"Yes... and no. I do not wish to gain... advanced knowledge of Human... engines. I wish... no one to see me as... a threat."

Sam nodded slowly, understanding that perfectly, and the Captain gave her a knowing nod. She placed her empty glass on the desk, refilling hers and Halo's glass, then went back to sipping it gently.

"Like always, you never cease to impress me, Halo. I'm sure we can find some part of the ship to keep you busy on, when you are not in logistics."

"About that, Captain. Halo has recently told me that he no longer desires to participate in killing. He will do what he can, but doesn't want to be tied to combat any longer." Sam spoke up, just finishing her drink.

The Captain nodded slowly, her gaze traveling back to Halo, "Is that true?"

"Y-yes."

The Captain again nodded, finishing her drink before placing the glass to the side. She thought about the options, and what she could do so Halo felt more at home here. She was about to say something, when the intercom came alive, requesting the Captain's appearance in the docking bay. She stood and straightened out her uniform.

"Looks like that is all for today," she spoke, watching them both stand, and all at once they saluted each other.

Sam and Halo exited the Captain's room, Halo catching a glance out of the large bay windows, before he saw a purple entity, seemingly floating in space, almost glaring at him? He returned the gaze as well, frowning a bit and wondering why the A.I. was looking like she wanted to kill him, and Sam stepped forward.

"Katrina, that's enough," she spoke, the AI looking to Sam and turning away.

"Very well," she spoke, going back to processing commands for the ship.

Halo then understood about the voice. The A.I. that many of the Covenant have tried and failed to retrieve, and the sudden importance about it. From what he understood, capturing the A.I. was among the highest priorities when boarding a Human class ship. It would lead them directly back to their home world, and because of this, the Cole Protocol was established. No ship would lead them back to Earth, even inadvertently. No ship would allow the Covenant to capture the A.I. which would lead them back to Earth. In short, the entire ship and crew was expendable if it meant the protection of the Earth. The A.I. also, was top priority in guarding. It housed strategy, ship coordinates, number of planets inhabited, and the location of Earth. If the Covenant were to acquire this information, they could kill every last Human Being in the universe. The price of letting the A.I. be captured... was extinction. It was also probably why Katrina hated him. Her sensors made it able to see past the admittedly low-tech illusion of the hologram surrounding Halo, but Sam had explained before that Katrina had been programmed to accept the existence of just one Covenant on this ship, and would keep that information



classified from anyone but the Captain.

Halo simply headed back down the hall with Sam. He wasn't going to meet with the Colonel, he was sure that he would find him eventually, and Sam's priority was being with Halo, so she couldn't meet the Colonel either. Instead, they just went to the gym for some exercise. Sam wanted to knock the block off of a punching dummy, and Halo wanted to brush up on his reading and writing skills.

Sam was giving it all she got against the dummy, weaving and keeping her skills up, and Halo managed to sneak in a few peeks of her working out. He was tempted to do the same, but felt his mind needed the exercise the most. Occasionally he did stop Sam to ask about a few words he was reading on the tablet, and she gladly helped him with meaning, pronunciation, and writing. His hand writing was a mess, but it could still be read, it was the pronunciation that he had trouble with. Words with definite ways of pronouncing, other than complicated vowels and structure, gave him hard times. The complex words were easy, considering his language was very complex, but the simple words had to be pronounced quite exact. Sam even tried to get a few lessons from Halo in the Covenant language, but she quickly gave up on the idea. Trying to pronounce something in Covenant was hurting her throat. She was more than happy to learn about certain manners, however.

"Oh, Halo. I forgot to mention, we're on leave again for about a week. We get to go topside to the crew's habitat." she spoke and smiled happily, wiping her forehead of sweat.

"Crew.. habitat-at?" he asked, lifting his gaze from the tablet as he tilted his head at her.

"Yup. It's the top most level. Super strong glass dome, a pool, a wonderful villa. You'll love it."

"I'm sure... I... will." he spoke, reaching for some water as he took a sip, "when?"

"In a few days." she spoke and smiled happily, going back to beat on the poor dummy.

Halo rumbled gently, setting the tablet down as he contemplated that. Kind of like a vacation. As close to Earth as a Covenant could ever hope to be. It was an honor, to be invited to that kind of peace, if only for a week. And it was Christmas, he had found out through the days reports. Everyone had something special planned today, and the Colonel visiting, he was sure it was his duty to attend a party. Speaking of which, there was a large party scheduled for later, though absence of Sam's squad kept him in concern. It was a cleansing mission, rescuing a Human civilization, and he had heard it was a success. Sam and him were simply waiting for them to return.

The days passed on, eagerly awaiting to head to the Crew's Habitat. Something didn't sit well with Halo, however. The Colonel. The two had met briefly before they had to part, and it left him with a sour taste. He tried to tell Sam about this, but she accounted his overly straightforwardness to stress. He had a lot of ships to visit during the Christmas week, and it must have been getting to him. But for right now, it was the Crew's Habitat. A big gift for crew members that have contributed so much to their Captain. Naturally, Samantha

and Halo, were perfect candidates. The two of them were a good team, the Captain thought, and decided the both of them earned some good R & R.

Samantha was so excited, she had never been there before. Halo didn't know what to think. He simply dismissed it as Human hyper activity Syndrome. Something he made up when trying to describe Sam to his superiors. But alas, the day had come. Sam collected her clothes, packed them into a duffle bag, and set up the lifts with Halo. It lifted them to the top, and Sam hopped to the door, placing the card in the slot, causing the doors to slide open. She stepped in, and was immediately hit with warmth. The artificial sun shone brightly on her face, and she looked around. Halo noticed it too. It was huge. Grass, some trees, lots of water, and a moderately sized villa. He expected this room to take up the entire level, but quickly realized that there were several of these themed rooms. Every good battle ship had some place for pleasure, and this particular battleship, gave the illusion of home. It wasn't that different from some places on his own home world, though he'd be damned if he could remember what his home world looked like. It was the one piece of critical information that Halo simply did not have. The Captain and Colonel were disappointed, but it only added to his concern of his lost memory.

## 6. Chapter 6

Mmmmm. This is peaceful. The sun shining down on me, the sound of water running along the tiny waterfalls, the breeze, and genuinely fresh air. I never want to leave.

Such thoughts were interrupted when he felt a large splash of water land on his face. He lifted his head from the chair, frowning in confusion before he spotted Sam, frolicking in the shallow end of the pool, closest to him.

"Are you coming in or what?" she asked in mild irritation.

She had been trying to get him to at least take a dip in the water for the last day, but he refused and had been on that chair for the last... two days, according to her observation. She was determined to get him to do something fun. Something genuinely Human. But what could she do, she thought. If he wanted to be lazy, that was his choice. She again splashed him with water, and he growled a bit. His peaceful thoughts being interrupted once more, and he finally got up.

She blinked a bit when she watched him leave, wondering if she made him mad, and started to look for him. A towel was slid around her waist, and she flipped her hair back, wondering where Halo had trudged off to. There was only so many places he could hide, and she started to search through the villa, around it, back through the shrubs, before ending back up at the pool. A shriek soon filled the air as she felt cold water dumped all over her, her body stiffening like a board while her face contorted into a look of shock and disbelief.

She spun around, spotting Halo and the bucket he had, his mandibles clicking while he made a pulsing kind of growl. He was laughing.

"You sneak!" she gasped, shivering a bit as he continued laughing.

She gasped a bit more, goose bumps covering her skin as she slowly made her way to the hot tub to get warm, still not believing what he had done. She dipped herself in, and was surprised when Halo started to climb in as well. He winced a bit, not expecting it to be this hot, and soon was in up to his waist, his large stature preventing him from slithering down to his neck like Sam had done. But, it was warm and cozy, a feeling he had not felt since before he joined the armed forces of the Covenant. He was quickly back in his state of bliss.

"Hmmm... Halo?" Sam asked, staring at the artificial sky as she felt something... odd.

"Yesss?" he asked, closing his eyes as he started to sink deeper.

Sam continued to stare at the sky, letting her body drift a bit from the jets of the tub, and felt something brush against her feet. She explored what it was, and found it was the Covenant's large foot brushing her own. It didn't seem like he knew he was touching her by accident, and a quick glance showed that he appeared to be asleep.

"Halo?" she whispered again, wondering if he was indeed asleep.

"Yesss?" came the soft reply.

"You're playing footsie's with me," she commented.

He lifted his head a bit, noticing his foot sliding against hers, and quickly bolted upright, splashing water around him.

"Ss... Sssorry!" he said, looking like he had been a puppy that was just whacked by a newspaper.

She giggled a bit and shook her head, flicking some water at him, "You don't have to be sorry," she spoke, getting comfortable again. Halo took the time to slither back into the water, until only his head was above the warmth, and closed his eyes once more. This time he was more careful to keep his feet away from hers. The two didn't say anything, nor did they have to. This was heaven, for both of them. Not a care in the world, warmth all around their bodies, a clear day. Granted it was all artificial, but meh, who could care when they were this relaxed? Samantha just couldn't wait until nightfall, however, to see the splendor of space through the glass dome. It was like the perfect evening.

When Halo fell asleep, she slowly climbed out of the tub, letting the water drip from her body, and headed into the villa. She kept her eye on Halo, to make sure he didn't fall under the water, and took this time to go through her mail, send messages to her family back on Earth, get in touch with current events. When she was done, Halo was awake, having turned the jets on higher, and feeling the massaging across his body. He sprung alive when he felt the coolness of a shadow over him, then looked up and spotted Sam towering over him. He

simply tilted his head.

"Comfy?" she asked.

"Com... fi?"

"Are you comfortable?" she corrected herself, kneeling down before she smiled.

"Oh... y-yesss." he whispered, closing his eyes once more.

"You just relax then. I'm going to work on getting something to eat, okay?"

He nodded slowly, sliding deeper into the tub and rumbled deeply. When she left, he looked around slowly, climbed out of the tub, then found the climate controls. Instead of day light, he wanted a soft glow of moonlight. A few button presses and lights coming on later, it was a comfortable feeling. He slid back into the tub, and once more became comfortable. With the sun out of his gaze, replaced by stars slowly moving, he felt more relaxed.

Sam came back half an hour later, wheeling in a tray of food. Since it was discovered that a Covenant can eat Human food, she decided to treat him to something special. The age old and traditional meal of burgers and fries. Halo was busy drying himself off, sliding the towel over his skin and absorbing the water, before he heard the door open, hiding quickly in case it was someone other than Sam. When he saw her tell-tale red hair, he relaxed considerably, heading back into the open as she locked the door.

"Halo?" she spoke, looking around, then spotted him and smiled, "I've got something for you."

She removed the lid from the plate, and on it were the burgers and fries, some drinks, and a good helping of the typical Covenant diet, a gelatin which Halo's body needed to live. Just in case he didn't approve of the Human meal. She wheeled the cart to a table, starting to set their places, while Halo carefully sat in the chair, looking over the selections, trying to figure out how to react. She offered him first burger, which he took, and sniffed it in curiosity. Meat. Okay, that wasn't so bad. He had lots of meat before. He then took a nibble of it, wondering what it would taste like, and hmmm'd. It was a little bland, though seeing Sam diving right into hers, he decided to just eat. This was far better than that sugary gelatin, though he was sure he was going to be having some of that as well.

With the meal over, Halo let out a long breath, drinking a bottle of water as he watched Samantha start to clean up the plates. He played this meal smart. After the nibble, he ate half of the gelatin, then finished with the burger, just to round out the taste. The taste of the gelatin and the burger, turned out to be quite pleasant, and he decided to make a mental note of combining his food with other types of Human food.

Sam placed the cart by the door, stretching out as she patted her tummy, "That was a good meal," she spoke, taking a beer as she opened it.

She sipped on it, then licked her lips, offering Halo some of her

drink. He didn't like Scotch, but she wondered if he would like any other kind of alcohol. Halo raised his eye ridges, realizing there wasn't any glass to pour the beer into, and cocked his head back. He looked around, searching for an excuse out of drinking from the bottle, before she forcefully placed the bottle into his hand. She lifted his hand for him, held the bottle before his mouth, and poured a few drops into his mouth. He clicked his mandibles, unsure about the taste. Chalky, really, but in all reality, it wasn't bad. Sam took her bottle back, taking a long swig before she placed it on the table.

"You shouldn't be so nervous around me Halo. You're part of my team now. Sharing a beer, is a team thing," she spoke, trying to quell his uneasiness.

Part of a team.... He stared at her with that same blank, taking in everything but not making sense of it look. She swigged her beer once more, moving back into her chair and crossed her legs. Like him, she had taken a few moments of her life to really appreciate what was around her. The sky, the water, the time alone with a friend. She wondered if he felt the same way she did. She was confident that the Covenant shared many feelings with Humans, but could they....

She shook her head a bit, then stood before she took her drink, heading off to the side, to the small waterfall. A shower wouldn't hurt, she thought, gathering some shampoo and conditioner, then padded into the corner of the room, shaped like a waterfall. It was a brilliant shower, she thought, and when she stepped in, shivered at the cool feeling of the water, quickly turning the warmth up. She sighed, undoing the top of her bathing suit, then completely slid out of her clothes, dropping them off to the side.

Halo tilted his head a bit, realizing Sam was taking a shower, and turned just when the last part of her clothes came off. He looked away quickly, as it was custom for other Humans not to intrude on such privacy. The villa. Yes, that was a good place. He quickly padded into the small house, then closed the door, hoping he wouldn't be slapped like last time for intruding by accident.

When she was done, she draped a towel around herself, covering her more private parts of her body, then stepped into the room, finding another towel to wrap around her head.

"Halo?" she asked, looking at the bed, and Halo sitting on it.

He looked to her, looking at her style of dress now, then stood before he tilted his head.

"Why don't you grab a shower, alright? Get your skin nice and clean. I've left some soap in it also. Come on, I'll do your back." she said happily.

It was then he started wondering how much she really had to drink. In his experience, Humans slowly became someone else when they induced too much alcohol into their body. He wondered if she was suffering the same effects? But he didn't argue, he simply walked out, and headed to the waterfall. Unfortunately, the top of his head met right at the top of the mini-falls, and he wasn't going to get clean there. But ah well. He stepped inside, then looked at the bar of soap Humans used to clean their body. He tilted his head left and right, and was

surprised when Sam took his hand and started to make a lather.

"Like that. Get some good suds going," she spoke, stroking his hand a bit more, until it looked like it was frothy.

She promptly placed his hand on his chest, rubbing it around, spreading the soap, and he quickly got the idea. His kind of cleansing rituals for his species involved cold moments of having something thick poured on them, and then wiped off. That did the trick when he was with them, but with the Humans, he had to do it like this. He did prefer the Covenant way, to be honest. His hands moves about him, and soon rinsed himself off, before he was instructed to kneel. He knelt down as best as he could, and felt Sam's hands at his back, scrubbing all over the place. His eyes closed, and found he enjoyed the touch of a Human on his back.

Sam smiled widely, watching the Covenant slip further and further into bliss, and soon stood under the splashing water as well, stroking his head, spreading the soap around, finding herself moving closer. Her hands moved around his neck, working the soap in. Halo parted his mouth gently, leaning into the delicate touches before opening his eyes. Sam's head was moving closer to his.

Her breath washed over his face as she moved even closer, the eyes of the Covenant growing wider.

It was the first kiss he had ever received.

He was shocked she would do such a thing. When she moved her face back, she had a content look on it, a soft smile creeping to her lips in the process. Halo didn't know what to say. It had to have been the beer. Yes, the beer. He understood it was a Human sign of affection, but to a Covenant? It had to have been a mistake. She didn't say anything else, instead returning back to washing him. When he was nice and clean, she stepped back and looked at her towels. Completely soaked. She went for a few more, wrapping herself up, then started to dry Halo. Affection.... He put aside that oddity of that kiss, and soon started to bask in that feeling of affection. No, not affection. Acceptance. He closed his eyes, not having felt anything like this before. When Sam was done, she stepped back and draped the towel over his shoulder and smiled.

"How about a few more drinks?" she asked, already heading to the cart.

Halo was about to stop her. She had given him a kiss, on the account of the alcohol, and as far as he knew, that's as far as she would go. He was relieved when she came back with bottles of water, and offered one to him. He drank from the bottle, heading back to his chair he called home, at least for a while, and stared at the stars. Sleep was soon needed, and he yawned, spreading his jaws out wide for a moment before finishing his drink. He stood, watching Sam watching some television in the villa, before padding past her.

"Good... night." he growled, yawning again before he made his way into the bedroom.

Sam was very considerate, letting him have the large bed. She took the couch, since he couldn't fit in it anyway, and found some very relaxing sleeps. He was climbing into bed, feeling his feet stick out

over the edge like always, and closed his eyes. The sounds of the breeze fluttering through the trees on either side of him through the windows, was quickly starting to lull him to sleep.

His dreams were eventful, to say the least. He was squirming in bed, making growling noises as he felt something moving under the sheets, the eerie feeling sliding over his entire body. A few whimpers filled the air as he felt what could only be tentacles sliding under him, and a few twine around his arms and legs, pulling them apart. It was a feeling of terror, feeling what could only be described as spores striking his face, the greatest threat in the universe starting to consume him.

It wasn't possible. There had to have been warnings of this kind of biological threat on the ship, why didn't Sam at least know about it? He squirmed and writhed a bit more under the sheets, baring his teeth as he tugged firmly at his bonds.

"It... It's growing inside of me!" his panicked voice cried out in the Covenant language.

A tendril wrapped around his neck, and he lost it. He tried clawing it off with his free hand, but its grip was far too powerful. He lifted his head off of the bed, gasping for air as he felt the mass of sickly tendrils grow larger, until his bed itself had been overrun by these vile things. He was about to give up all hope, until the swarm started to rise on top of him. Soon, Major Samantha Kidman was straddling his chest. Void of all clothing, and staring at him with a smug and evil demeanor. She traced her fingers down his chest with one hand, the other pinning his shoulder down before she leaned closer.

Halo was fixed on her eyes, not daring to look anywhere else. The terror in his face, even for something as menacing as an Elite Covenant baring his teeth, he was scared to death. The objects of his nightmares for countless years, and now, Samantha was one of them. She simply laughed, a gurgled and vile sound as her head tilted back. She slammed his shoulders down, growling deeply at him before straddling him a bit more.

"You are mine, Covenant," she hissed, her voice dripping acid, "your spirit and... your body."

"S-Sam... no..." he whimpered, shaking his head again before he felt his new necklace of flesh grow to a vice grip.

He gasped for breath, unable to move any longer, struggling with all of his might as he watched Sam lower her face to his. Her mouth opened wide, far wider than any Human could do. Her gurgled hiss filled the air as he started to see spots in his vision from the lack of air. He could barely make out something inside of her mouth before she leaned closer. Unable to breathe, call for help, or fight back, his body bucked and writhed when he felt something force it's way down his throat....

Halo yelped, bolting upright inside of the bed as he looked around with panicked eyes. His chest was heaving with breath, the tingles of his body dancing over him. The dream was vivid and clear. It was like what he had just dreamt, was nothing more than a punishment from his Gods for his betrayal to the religion. He just closed his eyes,

leaning his head back into the pillow as he caught his breath. He sighed slowly, feeling something warm move over his chest, and he touched it, feeling soft skin before he fell back into slumber.

Samantha just sighed, curling up further under the blanket as she squeezed his hand, hoping she could somehow stop another nightmare.

## 7. Chapter 7

A soft chirping starting to fill the void known as darkness. Samantha's eyes slowly opened to the sound. She squirmed a bit, feeling a firm warmth behind her before she looked at the nightstand. Her small PDA was dimly blinking to the soft chirps, and she groaned. She took a hold of it, letting her eyes focus before she looked it over. It was some kind of alert. Ugh, English at 4 am.... Halo could have understood what it was more than she could this early in the morning. She yawned widely, licking her lips a bit before she winced, clutching her neck. It was very sore, but more pressing matters were at hand. When she could focus, she read what the small screen had to say.

Pillar of Autumn under Critical Alert. All hands report to designated stations.

"Dammit," she cursed, sliding out of the arm of the one beside her, and quickly rushing to get her clothes.

She managed to get her pants and a military issue bra on, before she nudged the sleeping form's shoulder. She frowned when he didn't wake. She shook a bit harder, and saw the eyes of him open, glancing around quickly.

"Halo, we have to get to the bridge," she spoke with concern, slipping on her shirt and quickly buttoning it up.

"Early...." Halo grumbled, slowly getting up as he flexed his jaws slowly.

Samantha took his projector watch, then quickly placed it around his wrist and activated it, the Human image obscuring the threatening Covenant, and helped him to his feet. She quickly poured herself a cup of coffee, took a few long gulps of the cold liquid, then hurried to get her boots on. When she couldn't find the other one, Halo helped out, handing her the foot wear before lifting her to her feet. She smiled a bit, but given the seriousness of the situation, a sense of humor was beyond her.

Halo and Samantha quickly rushed to the bridge, stepping out into the hall and taking the lift down to the deck of the bridge. Upon exiting, pulsing red lights filled the corridors, contrasting the moving figures of those that lived here. The crew members, having been waken up by the alarms of Katrina, were running around in a blind panic. The Raven's Night, was on full alert. Halo had to be careful not to bump in to anyone, risking his presence. He didn't know what was happening, but he was sure he would be shot, given the look of concern on everyone's face. Before long, him and Samantha stepped onto the bridge, approaching the Captain and promptly



saluting. She saluted back, then turned back to the bridge. Once again, Katrina glared at Halo. He simply sighed and avoided her gaze. Everyone stood and faced the Captain, at attention. She held her breath, preparing to relay the information she had just acquired to everyone on the ship. A nervous finger pressed the All Decks button, broadcasting her statement to everyone on board.

"As of 03:00 hours, we have received emergency distress calls via the UNSC Network, from both the planet Farthern Star, and a Halcyon-Class Battleship: The Pillar of Autumn. Two days before the activation of the SPARTAN-II project, Covenant forces had attacked planet Reach, and destroyed most of the payload. The mission to infiltrate a Covenant vessel and learn the location of the Covenant home world, has failed. The Pillar of Autumn has survived the attack with the one remaining SPARTAN-II that we know of, and has jumped to an area undisclosed to lead the Covenant away from Earth. They too, were under attack. Attempts to contact the ship have been useless, and we can only assume they had followed Cole Protocol, and had self destructed their vessel.

Unfortunately, there has been a similar attack on the planet Farthern Star. Primarily a colony of Humans. This ship, the Raven's Night, has been ordered by the UNSC to head to Farthern star to look for survivors. Being the closest, we expect to arrive at the planet in two days. I have also received information that Colonel McPherson was expected at planet Farthern Star for the activation of the SPARTAN-II, and he will instead be boarding the Raven's Night in under eight hours to accompany us to our destination. We will prepare for his arrival, and then head to Farthern Star to continue our main objective."

The Captain stopped speaking, her gaze wandering over everyone within the bridge, and she could easily see their worried expressions. She cleared her throat and adjusted her uniform.

"Gentlemen. We are about to head into harm's way. I do not know if there are any survivor's on planet on the Star, nor do we know if anything is salvageable. If all else, our orders are simple: find survivors, and get the hell out of there. If there are none, well.... Destroy any traces of our technology present. We can't afford to let them have even a calculator. If there are any soon to be prisoners of war, we will liberate them, and destroy the threat surrounding a hallmark in our species.

Now, we are going in blind. We have no idea what the circumstances are surrounding our landing, but one thing can be certain. There will be shooting. We have no reason to believe the Covenant has deserted the Star, and we are preparing for one hell of a battle. None the less, if there are any survivor's at all, we... WILL... find them. We're the toughest sons of bitches in the entire universe!"

She slammed her hands down on the console, making everyone stiffen like a board.

"Farthern Star may have suffered a great blow, and if we fail those that haven't died in vain by rescuing our people, then we fail every Human Being in the universe. We let down our Mother, our home, Earth, by losing this war. We will teach the Covenant that we too have a right to exist in this universe. To our enemy, we are abominations against their Gods. If their Gods think that we don't have a place in

their grand scheme, we will be victorious over them too! We are Humans! Our race will be victorious against all odds! We will continue to exist in this universe. It is our God given right, and no one, will take that from us!"

Captain Anderson turned off the intercom, and simply stared at her crew. They had renewed faces, as though they were the invincible. Farther Star has been there for them countless times, and now, it needed their help. No one was about to tell them otherwise. Halo, on the other hand, simply stared at Captain Anderson. He had heard speeches like that several times before from his own commanders. Aside from appearance, he wondered what really separated a Human from a Covenant. Spending time on both sides now, the only thing that separated the two, was their religious beliefs. It's a story he's heard time and time again while researching the history of the Humans. Not unlike his people's own history. Both were sad to read about, but both were necessary to shape the future.

Halo simply stood where he was, lifting his head slowly as the cheers and the whoops filled the air. The echo's of everyone aboard the ship filled the metal halls. Surrounded by a thousand Humans, he suddenly once again felt like the enemy. The Captain turned to him, and he was immediately at attention.

"Halo, I know you have been there for us since your defection, so I regret to inform you that your services will once again be required." she spoke with a tone of seriousness.

Halo lowered his head slightly, then nodded.

"What I need you to do, is monitor the star charts. You are familiar with Covenant boarding procedures, and we need you to keep a watchful eye on the monitors. You may use my private chambers for your assignment, and Major Kidman here will assist you in any way possible. After we join with Colonel McPherson, we will be landing on Farther Star further in the day, and I would like you to lead a group of my finest soldiers, the Major and her squad included, for reconnaissance."

Halo nodded again, then lifted his hand to salute, "Y-yes... Captain."

"Major Kidman. You are required to see to it that Halo gets a run down on small arms weaponry in the mean time. I want him familiar with our weapons until he gets a chance to retrieve the weapons he's already been trained in." Anderson spoke, turning back to the bridge, "Katrina. You will also transfer a sub-routine of yourself to aide in their progress."

Katrina frowned a bit, then nodded, "Yes Captain."

He wasn't pleased by the news, but he did fight for the Humans now. When he was dismissed, Halo immediately went into the Captain's quarters, then glanced at all of the star charts. Their route was already plotted, and they were well on their way to Farther Star. The Sword of Damocles' route was also given to them, and they would meet well before Farther Star to coordinate their attack strategy. Kidman was right besides him, explaining the finer details of the maps, so he could work a bit better. A purple glow of light signaled the appearance of Katrina, and she stood, the sentient hologram

observing Halo as he was explaining potential threats. They were not what Sam or Katrina expected. Covenant ships almost always came from behind. Their faster ships allowed them to do so, and watching their back was something that most Human vessels simply ignored. The residual ions in the engines' wake, however, almost always provided a perfect cover for the Covenant.

Sam was working on a few more maps, showing areas in and around planet Farthern Star, while Halo was busy pointing out areas that would most likely be heavily guarded, and other areas that were of no concern to the Covenant. He also confirmed that there would be survivor's at the colony, however, how long they would be allowed to live was a different story. It all depended on who the Commander was. Katrina was glancing at the maps as well, formulating a plan of insertion, and the best areas of landing that wouldn't alert many Covenant forces to their presence. Their collection of Scorpions and Warthogs would prove to come in handy, by landing a ways from the base. The plan was simple. Bottleneck the Covenant forces, and force them to move in one direction. He was rather surprised to find the planet was quite hospitable, though it was quite warm. Still, combat in an atmosphere that Human and Covenant could survive in, gave him so much more ideas to play around with in regards to tactics.

Katrina, despite her distaste of working with a Covenant, had to admit that he had some good strategy. It wasn't a secret that with his skills, he would have eventually been promoted to the highest honor of Elite. Halo had to stop, taking a seat in the Captain's chair, and laid his head back. He had been sleeping well until the alert, but with only a few hours, he needed to rest while Samantha went to go and get some coffee and something to eat. Katrina just stared at Halo, then sighed.

"Covenant, come here." she spoke.

Halo tilted his head, then stood slowly, moving before the hologram, "Yes... ma'am?" he asked, not at all pleased to be interrupted. He just wanted five minutes to clear his mind.

"The Captain instructed Major Kidman to give you a basic training course on small arms fire. Unfortunately my sensors have indicated that she will be a while before she returns. She needs to coordinate her squad as much as anything right now before we land ."

"Land? In this size of ship?" he asked curiously.

"Well, this is an Ansalon class ship. Meaning, there's a part of the ship that disconnects to allow atmospheric flight. We're in that part of the ship now. I'm sure you know what a drop ship is, Covenant."

"I do."

"Then you shouldn't worry too much. We should get started."

Halo nodded slowly, then looked to the hologram named Katrina, and heard a small door open. He turned to the side, and saw a wall filled with a few pistols, some assault rifles, and a fragmentation grenade. She highlighted the pistol.

"The M6D light infantry pistol. 12.7 millimeter, semi armor piercing rounds," she spoke, while Halo lifted the weapon.

He played around with the grip, trying to get his hand to fit comfortable, and found a position he felt that would hold the weapon in place. His only gripe that it was rather small. He'd have preferred a Needler, if one were available.

"This weapon fires in two selectable modes. Semi-automatic, or automatic fire. The trigger is of the double pull variety for selection of the rate of fire. Move the trigger in a bit for one shot bursts, pull it completely back for automatic fire. To reload, press the magazine release when the slide... that's this part," she pointed to the top, "is locked back completely. Push in another magazine until you hear a click, then press this lever, to release it. Do you understand?"

Halo frowned a bit, fiddling with the weapon, then shook his head, "No."

Katrina closed her eyes and shook her head. It took a good while, but soon Halo began to understand how the weapon operated. He was locking the slide back, placing empty magazines into it, cocking the weapon when it was ready. He squeezed the trigger a bit, hearing a sort of snap in the process as the firing pin tried to strike a chambered bullet that was not there. He placed the weapon back before Katrina highlighted the assault rifle with a red light, and Halo picked that up. Still much different than his plasma rifles, but this one was much more comfortable to hold.

"MA5B, standard infantry weapon. Works very much like the M6D. When empty, press this button here to eject the magazine, place another one in, then pull this lever to re-arm. This is a fully automatic weapon, intended for short or medium ranges. Watch your ammunition in the counter here," she pointed to the small read out, "and point of reference, which is decided shortly before the battle. While on ship, it will always be pointing to the center of the bridge."

Halo nodded slowly, lifting the weapon and trying to find a comfortable position for it, all the while seeing if he could look through the integrated scope. It was easy enough to find targets, and he was satisfied that he could use such a weapon if needed. He just couldn't shake the uneasy feeling, holding a weapon that in the hands of Humans, killed countless Covenant. He placed it back on the rack, looking at a fragmentation grenade. Very much similar to the sticky plasma grenades the Covenant army used. He was surprised to find out they operated much in the same way as well. Pull the pin and throw it. Unfortunately, it won't stick to enemies, which he was secretly hoping they would.

"Anything else that you would like to know about our weapons?" Katrina asked, watching him shake his head.

Halo just went back to the maps. Katrina would show the Covenant alternate forms of insertion, and the precise battle plan for when they landed, and he would pick out faults, and try to find other ways of procedure. Loss of life was completely real here, and there would be many spots where battles would be inevitable. Shades, the single manned guns of the Covenant, were pointed out in the most likely of spots, and Katrina started labeling them as high risk.

A few levels below, the Captain was doing a routine examination of her ship, watching her crew do their assigned jobs. She stopped at a large bay window, staring at the activity in the docking bays. The hall that led around the docking back, all had these large windows, and all of them were blast proof, considering the Docking Bay, in essence, was an air lock. She puffed on her cigar, arms folded across her stomach as she studied her crew with her watchful eye, wanting their actions to be perfect. Marines were refueling the vehicles, loading weapons, organizing themselves, and sparing no time to make sure everything went as smoothly as possible. She then turned to Samantha, who was by her side.

"Do you think Halo will be a problem?" she asked bluntly.

Sam lowered her gaze, then shook her head, "I don't think so, Captain."

"Hmm.... This is between us, but we are placing him in a highly combative situation when we land on Farthern Star. For our soldiers, it is called post traumatic stress disorder. You yourself have admitted that he shows signs of this."

"That is true, Captain. When push comes to shove though, I have no doubt he will take up arms and fight, despite his willingness not to."

"I see. But, Major... just who's side will he fight on?"

Sam cocked her head slowly, but could understand completely, why her Captain would bring this up. She still had doubts about the legitimacy of Halo's defection. But could Halo have that Covenant side of him rekindled by seeing more of his people again? She didn't know how he would react to things. But if all else failed, and they needed to make a quick escape, Halo could have been used as a bargaining chip. To avoid capture, they could turn over the Covenant back to his people so they could escape. It pained Sam to think about that, but she knew the idea hasn't slipped past the Captain.

"Captain, I am confident that Halo will fight for us. He had admitted to me that he was betrayed by his people, and a Covenant Elite, especially his class, follows the orders of his commanders to the death. If we maintain our trust with him, he will continue to follow your orders, Captain."

Anderson nodded slowly, continuing to stare through the glass, then looked to Samantha, "Very well. He came in our care in trust, and we shall offer him the same. If one Covenant was willing to defect, then I am sure there would be more willing. It could be a turning point for the war. But just in case, I want you to remain with him when we send you out there. If he shows any signs that are not normal for him, you are to evacuate with him at once. Understood?"

"Understood, Captain." she spoke, rolling her shoulder a bit.

The Captain nodded slowly, though looked to her shoulder, and the bit of blood leaking through her clothes, "You're bleeding, Major."

Samantha tilted her head, then slid her hand around her neck, looking at it and seeing a few drops of blood on her palm. She blinked a bit, trying hard not to blush. The Captain noticed her face turning red, then pulled the shirt back to reveal what looked like a bite mark. She frowned a bit, adjusting her shirt again and hid the mark. Samantha just held still, and caught a knowing glance from the Captain. Shit, she knows. Her heart started thumping harder, and the Captain merely puffed on the end of her cigar..

"Huh," she spoke, taking her time, torturing the poor Major with a few moments of silence.

"I... slipped," she spoke, trying to remain confident, but it wasn't going over well with the Captain.

"Uh huh," the Captain spoke, inhaling a few puffs of smoke, then looked back to her.

Samantha lowered her head a bit, and knew she'd been busted. She opened her mouth, about to come out with the truth, and prepared to be thrown in the brig, before the Captain cleared her throat.

"Major Kidman, I suggest you head to the infirmary, and have that rather nasty look scrape looked at," she spoke, walking away, though stopped a few feet into her stride, turning to look at her, "and Major?"

"Yes Captain?" she asked, her heart still thumping quickly.

"Next time be more careful around the pool. Those edges are sharp," she spoke and continued on her way.

Samantha let out a contained breath of relief, swearing that she could feel her heart start to beat again.

## 8. Chapter 8

A message was sent to the Raven's Night warship later into the day, at precisely 18:00 hours. Colonel McPherson sent a message saying that the Raven's Night was in his radar, and the two ships would dock at 18:30 hours to organize. All hands were on deck, preparing for docking procedure. Halo and Samantha stood side by side, standing in front of her squad, and looked about the large bay. Many marines had shown up to welcome the Colonel, the Captain standing before the doors. There was a loud hiss of gas escaping, and soon the mechanical whine of the doors opening filled the bay. Everyone suddenly saluted, Halo tilting his head and quickly doing the same. Colonel McPherson stopped at the entrance, then saluted the Captain in greeting, both of them returning their hands to their sides.

Sam nudged Halo's side, and the two of them fell in place behind the Captain and the Colonel, as they headed to the bridge. They were promptly accompanied by a few of the Colonel's marines, and briskly walked into the command center of the Raven's Night. The Colonel saluted all of those standing before him, following the Captain into her quarters, while Katrina appeared and surveyed the situation.

"Report, Captain." the Colonel spoke, watching her immediately press

a few buttons on her desk, and Katrina took care of the rest.

"Sir. We have determined the best course of action for insertion on the planet Farthern Star. We will land our ships here, and here," she pointed at the map, about 100 miles from the colony, "board the Warthogs and Scorpions, and send our first wave of soldiers via these routes... here. Once close enough to the Military Installation, we will be sending our finest marines to... Katrina, the base layout, please?"

Katrina stared at the Colonel, a look that she had given Halo many times, before snapping back into reality, "Of course, Captain."

Another map appeared on the screen next to the birds eye view of the lands around the base, and soon a more technical map appeared. Captain Anderson cleared her throat and continued.

"These spots here. They are the most armored, but the least guarded, we're assuming. It is both a pain for the Covenant and the Marines to negotiate around these points, but a strategic element for our Marines, because of these high points indicated on the map here," she pointed to the other map, "the mountains here will provide us with excellent cover, and sniping positions here and here, could do an excellent job of protecting our marines."

By the suggestions of Halo here, he had informed us of a necessary point we needed to secure... here, at the most northern part of the facility. Structural blueprints indicate a rise in elevation at this point, possibly a hill, that winds down around to the eastern side of the base here. And that's our targets. The generators. We infiltrate through these drainage ditches, dispatch any Covenant inside, and then deactivate the generators. Halo has told us this will put the Covenant into a confused state, just long enough for our snipers to open fire, and draw attention from the main entrance... here, where the majority of our forces will storm and rid the area of Covenant infestation.

We will be executing the mission as soon as we land, which will be an estimated.... 12 hours and thirty seven minutes. I suggest we let our troops rest for six hours, and for the last six, prepare for battle, unless the Colonel has anything else to add to the mission plan?"

Colonel McPherson was simply rubbing his chin, taking in the plan, though looked to Anderson before he shook his head, "No. The mission plan seems very well prepared. It is also good to let our troops rest before the battle and make final preparations," he spoke, then turned to face Halo, nodding his head slowly, "good work, soldier."

Halo tilted his head slowly as he looked to the Colonel, though bowed his head respectfully, "Thank... you," he growled, then saluted the Captain.

"Have your A.I. send the information to the A.I. aboard the Sword of Damocles. If you excuse me, I should be returning to my ship. I am impressed at the plan we have, and I am confident that we will succeed in ridding the Covenant menace."

He turned, then promptly left with his marines, while Halo noticed

that same look on Katrina. She was busy uploading to the second ship, then looked to Halo for a moment, before turning her gaze back to the Captain. She took out one of her thin cigars, then lit it before taking a seat.

"You two should take the next six hours to rest. I have a feeling you both are going to need it," she spoke, then took a glass out of her desk along with the bottle of scotch.

Sam saluted the Captain, and Halo did the same, before exiting, passing through the bridge to the lift. Halo was strangely quiet about this. Samantha knew something was wrong, and turned to him, a look of concern in her eye.

"Something is bothering you." she spoke.

Halo nodded slowly, then looked back to her, "Don't like this...." he spoke, and didn't want to say anything about the Colonel, it couldn't have just been a Human trait, to be a bit more odd than anyone else, and he was a high ranking officer. For the moment, he just put it out of his mind. Samantha just left it alone, and nodded gently before moving closer to Halo. She felt comforted when he put an arm around her. It could very well be the last twelve hours of her knowing Halo, and she wanted to remember him for his kindness, and not what he could do on the battle field.

Samantha and him returned to the Crew's Habitat, stepping back into their overly large room, and started to collect their gear. She insisted on having a few more drinks, and set the alarm to wake her in four hours. She was insistent that Halo join her, but he politely refused, and needed to take a walk. He had something of his own to do. She let it be, and soon curled up into bed, minding the bandage just behind her neck, and soon fell into a slumber. Halo stared at the sky, closing his eyes for a few moments before he promptly left to find some place private.

He was fortunate that no one had stopped him while on his way to the storage bay at the other end of the ship. It was almost deserted, save for a few engineers and mechanics. When he was alone, he knelt in the middle of the floor, closing his eyes as he outstretched his arms, clapping his hands together, saying a silent prayer to his Gods, asking for guidance and protection, and above all else, mercy when he was caught by his fellow Covenants. It was inevitable at this point. They would do anything to see a traitor brought to justice, and jumping into the fray, he was practically giving himself up to them. He knelt for a long time, before he stood, turning around to find a few marines just entering the bay. There were three of them, one of which had accompanied the Colonel, and he frowned. He quickly stiffened, saluting the three of them, as they were higher rank.

"At ease, soldier," the leader of the three spoke, walking up to Halo.

Halo was confused by the presence of the three. There was supposed to be no one in here. Before he could figure out what was wrong, he was struck across the face, not the image of the human, but his hidden face. He fell to his knees, lifting his head as he growled, only to get a swift kick across it. He whined, holding his face as the three marines suddenly jumped him. His arms were pulled behind his back, secured in cuffs while the leader quickly held his jaws shut, his



partner taking the near by roll of duct tape and started to wrap it around his head. Scared for his life, Halo kicked and bucked, his screams for help silenced and muffled by the tap around his face. He couldn't see nor speak, and felt his feet being treated the same way.

The marine stood, chuckling softly before he started kicking Halo in the gut. The Covenant bucked and cried out with each attack, screaming for anyone to help him as he felt more blows land on his unprotected body.

"String him up, we'll leave him here until he's ready to see the prisoner," the leader of the three marines spoke, while one of his cohorts searched the area for some rope or for some chain.

He came back with rope, tying it around the neck of the Covenant, while the other moved a mobile hoist, lowering down the hook. The Colonel's guard just crossed his arms, watching his colleague's tie the other end of the rope, then press the button to raise the hook. Halo squirmed, his screams once again filling the air as he was steadily pulled to his feet by the hook, choking and trying to kick his legs. His feet were just barely left on the floor, keeping him from strangling himself, while the three marines simply gloated over their capture. Until there was a loud clang.

The Colonel's guard struck the floor, completely unconscious, while the other two Humans turned around, just meeting the end of a long pipe. Halo bucked again, not knowing what was going on, screaming for anyone to release him. He soon got his wish. The hook started to lower, and he fell to his knees, hearing the jingling of keys before he could breathe normally once more. The tape was torn from his ankles, and soon the makeshift noose untied. His hands were freed once again, just as he felt the tape around his head being pulled off of him. He quickly helped, managing to flex his jaws once again.

"Get it off of me!" he cried, squirming wildly before the last bit of tape was pulled from his face.

He opened his eyes in panic, searching around feverishly to find who had released him, but... no one was there. He looked behind him, behind any places of cover, everywhere. He was completely alone. His heart started to beat quicker, seeing the three marines laying on the floor and the lack of his savior. He climbed to his feet, gripping his side tightly as he panted, and gently rubbed. It really hurt there from the beatings, but he had to push the pain out of his mind, and had to tell the Captain of what happened to him, but that question of why he was released, and by who, rang well in his mind. He started moving, stepping over the unconscious, or were they dead, bodies of the marines, seeing the pipe used to strike them before stepping out and rushing to the nearest lift.

The doors opened when the lift reached its desired level, the Covenant stepping out and looking around quickly, seeing many of the lights off, every fourth light on. Thoughts entered his mind, wondering if the Captain was conserving power for the assault. He stepped out of the lift, turning to the right and looking for anyone, until he heard a sort of muffled bang on the floor come from behind him. He spun around, glancing back into the lift, his eyes scanning everywhere within the small box, trying to find something out of

place. He frowned a bit, turning away from the lift, then stepped quickly down the hall, but suddenly stopping as he swore he could feel something brush against his hand. He stared into the darkness, looking everywhere. Left, right, up, down. No one was around, and he knew he didn't brush his hand against the wall. A pair of doors suddenly opened down the hall, remaining open for several seconds, and closed before anyone stepped through. He frowned, tilting his head a bit, wondering why the doors would open on their own, until he made a realization. His blood ran cold. He knew what it was. Trying to remain calm, he continued on his way to the next lift. He waited a few moments, hearing what could only be silenced footsteps in a hall that had no people in it. He swallowed a bit, the doors in front of him opening, before he stepped in, pressing the button for the lift.

Again, that feeling. Something was right behind him, though invisible to the naked eye. He just controlled his breathing, and was surprised when the lift stopped at the level before the bridge. The doors opened once again, Halo's eyes looking for the signs of anyone, but again, nothing. He promptly stepped off the lift glad to be off of it, before he turned to the right, padding down the hall. He rounded a corner, spinning as he pressed his back to the wall, and listened for the doors to close. A full three seconds before there was any kind of sound of doors closing. His steps led him around in a large circle, trying to find the one lift dedicated to the bridge. He stopped, staring at the control plate, hanging out by its wires, and an out of order sign on the door. He tilted his head a bit, before turning to his right at the sounds of growling. He moved back, thinking he heard the sound from the left, then quickly ran to the right of the large hallway. He was looking over his shoulder as he rounded the corner, walking straight into someone. He stepped back in fright, his eyes wide as he stared at what he bumped into. He let out a long breath as he spotted a Human engineer.

"Whoa, no need to rush," the engineer spoke, watching Halo calm down.

"Where... is... the Captain?" he asked, trying to be as fluent as possible, and hoping he wasn't failing.

"Oh, Captain Anderson is on the bridge, speaking to the Colonel, making last minute preparations. The lift seems to have been malfunctioning, and I've been sent from engineering to try and fix the problem. If you need to see her, there are the stairs at the end of the hall." he spoke, motioning to either direction.

Halo nodded slowly, walking along with the Human, and watched as he moved to the lift, starting to fiddle with the wires behind the panel. He found himself at the entrance to the stairs, bending down as he went through the port. When he was sure no one was following him, he sprinted up the stairs. Nine levels at full tilt. He was jumping at least seven of the stairs at once, quickly turning around to vault up the next steps. At the bridge level, he padded through the portal, looking around quickly to just see the Captain walk into her quarters, and the Colonel start to follow.

The Colonel tilted his head slightly, then glanced to the doorway, spotting Halo. The two of them made eye contact. Halo fixed his gaze at the Colonel, blinking slowly as he felt his heart rate start to rise. His breathing became a little more needy, the sound of air

filling his lungs was soon bombarding his ears. While the two tried to stare each other down, the Colonel halted his walk to turn completely towards Halo. The Captain turned her gaze to the Colonel from within her quarters, watching in curiosity as the older man took a few steps forward, towards Halo. Katrina, watching the Captain and the Colonel, spotted the calm and blank look on the Colonel, then turned her gaze to see what he was looking at. She frowned slightly, staring at Halo, who had his gaze locked on the Colonel, not daring to remove it like his life depended on it. She wondered why an aging Human could stop a Covenant right in his tracks.

Captain Anderson stepped out of her quarters, looking at the Colonel, then looked to Halo. Halo? The three of them remained silent, not knowing what was going on, but Halo knew. He stared at the Human, staring into his eyes, and blinked slowly, wondering what was out of place. His eyelids closed again, as well as the lids on the Human image he was showing, his keen eyes trying to figure out something. Again a blink, and another, and yet another as time passed.

Halo flexed his jaws in secret, working out the dull ache there before tilting his head slowly as he just stared into the Colonel's eyes. Nothing happened for three solid minutes, it was just the two of them, trapped in their own little world. It was then Halo noticed that one single trait, something all Human's needed to do, and within a three minute time span, the Colonel lacked the ability to do one normal, Human trait.

The Colonel, did not blink.

Halo let out a quivering breath, feeling a fear well up inside of him before he drew in some air, "You're not human," his human image mouthed, a barely visible smirk appearing on the Colonel's lips.

"Neither are you." came Halo's mouthed reply.

The Captain watched the two of them, and soon started getting the attention of everyone within the bridge. All remained silent as the two continued to stare each other down, before Captain Anderson raised a hand slowly.

"What is the meaning of this, Halo?" she asked, frowning a bit at the utter lack of disrespect Halo was giving the Colonel.

Katrina looked back to Halo, seeing his demeanor change, noticing a change of temperature inside of him. His heart rate was rising for some reason. She looked back to the Captain, who also had a look of confusion on her face, while the two lifted their heads slightly, just as a Marine was starting to walk by his field of vision. Time seemed to slow down, almost crawling before Halo noticed the marine was past him. In one fluid motion, he gripped the marine's pistol out of his holster, then pushed him off to the side before raising the weapon at the Colonel.

"Halo no!!!" the Captain screamed, twisting her body as she quickly moved out of the way.

It was too late. Three bullets pulsed out of the barrel, twirling through the air at a speed no eye could register. The first projectile was on a perfect course towards the Colonel's chest, while

the other three were slightly more off. By the time the bullets were even half of the distance, everyone flinched at the sound of the report, already on their way to ducking before the bullets struck their target. With a resounding twang, the suddenly altered course drastically, the pulse of an orange field of energy sending the first one in other directions, while absorbing the impact of the two others. The Captain lifted her head from her cowered position, her hands by her head as she looked in time to see the residual effects of the shield fade back into nothingness, and even Katrina was shocked by this. Halo saw something that she had missed.

"Covenant...." she whispered in shock as Halo slowly lowered his weapon.

Halo growled loudly, pulling his arm back as a wave of blue energy just missed where his wrist was. That was all that Katrina needed before sounding the alarms. Sirens wailed, red lights started to flash about, while the Colonel looked to the left and right of him, a wide smirk on his face, watching the panic as Katrina announced of the intercom that Covenant were on board, and all hands report to battle stations. The crew in the bridge ducked behind their workstations, keeping down before the Colonel grabbed the Captain by the throat, pulling her into the middle of the room.

Halo watched the Colonel take the Captain out of the corner of his eye as he tried to find the source of the light. There was a loud growl, while a loud thump was heard as the grates in the ceiling fell to the floor. Halo saw the source of the light, and was busy watching this blue light dance around, before it waved again, soaring over his head and cutting cleanly through the doors to the lift. Halo hit the ground, watching as a form started waving before him, the image solidifying into the image of an Elite. The sword was trained at his neck, and he lifted his chin up, staring at him with wide eyes. He was still armed, but with something this dangerous at his neck, he wasn't about to make a move.

The Colonel watched as two dozen of his Elites seemingly fell from the ceiling, landing by several Humans, and quickly round them up. It took them a matter of a minute to effectively render the bridge under their control. McPherson gripped Anderson's neck in a very inhuman way, then presented her to the A.I.

"Disable the alert, computer," he spoke, his voice insinuating that he would do something very bad if she didn't.

Katrina quickly did as she was ordered to, the sirens and the lights returning back to their passive state, but from her sensors, she knew it was enough to send a squad of marines up to the bridge to investigate what would happen. The Colonel frowned a bit before holding Anderson tighter moving closer to the middle of the deck, then stared out into space. The sounds of marching boots up the stairs were soon heard, five Marines flooding through the door and opening fire. The Colonel, distracted by the sudden intrusion, watched as two of the marines were quickly dispatched by plasma fire.

The Elite with the sword to Halo's neck turned his gaze to the doorway, and in that brief moment of time, Halo swerved out of the way of the searing blade, before planting one firm kick to the foremost

joint of digit-grade legs. A crunch filled the air as the Elite howled in pain, such sounds ending shortly after its own blade was used to lop his own head off. The Captain, struggled a bit more as the Colonel was shouting orders in the Covenant language. A small protective cover flitted open upon Katrina's requested, and Anderson kicked her legs out, getting her heel to hit the tiny button inside. A module appeared at the base of Katrina's holographic base.

"Get her out of here!" she screamed at Halo, before the Colonel realized what was happening.

Anderson gasped for air, clutching at the hand around her throat, and out of the corner of her eye saw Halo dashing for the module. His hand clutched around it, and he sprinted towards the Captain's quarters. He dived inside, kicking the door closed as the Colonel growled.

"Elites, capture the traitor! Alive!" he barked, though grinned evilly, "but he no longer requires the use of his limbs. Go now! Retrieve that A.I."

The Captain's eyes went wide as she tried to kick a bit more, feeling herself lifted into the air. She struggled for breath, the blood trapped in her head making her head feel like it was going to explode. She simply stared at the Colonel, her eyes wide with fright, before she was released and hit the floor. She coughed for life, clutching at her throat as she watched six blue armored Elites rush to the door, only to hear it lock. A few bangs later, and they realized the door was sealed shut. Though their plasma weapons would make short work of the metal door.

"Halo...." she gasped weakly, staring at the door.

Halo had his back pinned to the wall, breathing heavily as he stared at the module in his hands. This little module that so many Covenant's had died trying to retrieve, and now he was entrusted with keeping it out of the enemy's hands. Yes, enemy. Whom ever the Colonel was, he knew of his betrayal, and his orders issued, it made him sick to his stomach. He was going to be brought back to the home world, but not in one piece.

"Hey! Quit gawking and get me out of here!" the module came to life, the image of Katrina appearing on one of the screens.

Halo parted his mouth, panting a bit more before he shook his head, "How?"

"I don't know! This is a sealed room!" she said in annoyance.

Halo stared at the pistol. A lot of good this is going to do for me, he thought, then rested it on the floor before he heard very loud banging at the door, and to his dismay, it was starting to get warmer in here.

"The door is reinforced, but I don't know how long it will take for them to melt through it." Katrina warned, sighing softly.

"Weapons... need weapons." Halo growled in frustration, banging his head against the wall as he figured out a way out of

here.

"Weapons... we only have.... wait a minute! Wait a minute! Your gear was brought into this very room when you were taken prisoner." she spoke, searching around a bit, and a hidden door opened.

Halo moved from the wall, peering inside, and saw his black armor. He smiled a bit, and noticed his last weapon as a Covenant, his plasma saber. With no time to lose, he quickly donned his armor once again. He slid into the tight membrane, and fitted the poly metallic pieces of the armor in the right places. He took the helmet last, staring at it, then fitted it on his head before looking down at himself. Perfect, the camouflage was still portraying a human, and no Covenant. He took his saber, then quickly examined it. It was damaged, but he could still use it. He was dismayed that there were no other weapons, so he had to make due.

He placed the module inside a metallic pouch on his back, then held the saber before he looked at the door glowing red.

"Come on, Halo. We still need to get out of here!" she warned, thinking of anyway out.

Halo had a better idea. The nearly full bottle of scotch was still on the desk, and he opened it, giving it a firm sniff and shivered a bit, feeling the alcohol burn his lungs. He then poured it all over the walls and the door where it wasn't glowing before breaking the bottle in front of the door, letting the puddle of liquid soak into the carpet.

"What good is that going to do!?" Katrina spoke, getting more and more nervous.

"What is beneath this room?" he growled, moving back to the desk, then started search through the contents of the drawers.

"A hallway of the level below us." she replied, noticing him lift a book of matches and a few of the Captain's cigars before placing them into storage pockets, "what are you going to do?"

"Something," he said, taking his saber and activating it, staring at the blue glow filling the room.

He stabbed the sword into the floor, the carpet starting to burn and the metal beginning to melt rather easily as he moved the weapon through the material like a hot knife through butter. He made a wide circle, and soon the disc of floor fell to the level below, making a perfect escape route. His blade flickered a bit, before it suddenly over heated, which he discarded to the side. He was about to jump, when Katrina came to life.

"Wait. Arm yourself!" she spoke, opening the cabinet for all of the weapons, "I suggest a new pistol and an assault rifle, until you can come across better weaponry."

Halo took a hold of one of the pistols, loading it with a live magazine, then did the same for an assault rifle. He discarded the rest, being sure to have taken a few magazines for each weapon in the process.

"Almost ready," he spoke quietly, looking around the room once more.

He stopped at the Captain's liquor compartment, nodding slowly before Katrina just tilted her head. Halo grabbed the scotch, looking at it closely before he moved to the hole, frowning a bit as he tried to make out the words

The door was starting to have a hole burned into it, while the carpet smoldered violently from the intense heat from the saber. He hoped the metal of the circle wasn't hot enough that it would give him a serious burn.

"Ready," he growled, tossing the bottle at the door.

He swallowed heavily, then jumped. When he landed, he clutched at his face, the ambient heat affecting his eyes, and quickly placed a hand on the wall, guiding himself while Katrina did her best to lead him with very quiet beeps on the intercom speakers. Both she and him didn't know how he did it, but he managed to find a washroom, and quickly cupped water into his hands before splashing it onto his eyes, the feeling of his eyes drying out vanishing slowly, and the bit of rubbing was helping as well.

The Colonel watched in impatience as the door started to yield. Finally, he thought, watching as the bright golden metal dripped down the door. One of them looked down, spotting a liquid leaking from under the door, frowning in confusion about it, before the door erupted in flames when a hot drip of metal landed on the alcohol soaked carpet. The Captain's quarters were in flames, while Anderson simply watched in horror at the scene. Halo would be burned alive, but at least the module would be destroyed as well. She also remembered that the A.I. on the Sword of Damocles had no such information on Earth, but other vessels. The simple reason being, that ship was a short range version of a normal Lancia battle ship, used for transporting important people, and was never required to make trips back to Earth. For safety, it was armed with several Marines, but few external guns, and was usually guarded by an escort of at least six fighters.

She watched as the fires grew bigger, the Covenant Elites, stepping back from the heat, and stared into the inferno. They reported back to the Colonel, who merely growled.

"Kick the door in, I want that Traitor," he spoke, giving the impression that he wouldn't take know for an answer.

One of the Elite's bowed his head, staring at the door before he wound up and planted his foot at the cut handle. The door swung in violently, the bottle of scotch being slid with the door until it impacted the wall with great force. The fire erupted into an inferno once the contents met flame, making the room inaccessible to anyone for the moment. They told him that the fire was too large to give a proper visual, but for the good news, anyone caught in that room would have died from the heat. When the Elite's finished their visual report, the emergency fire systems came on, spraying the room in a type of foam, smothering the flames while the Elites put out the fire in front of the door. When the fire was snuffed, the foam started to disintegrate almost immediately, not even smoke coming out of the room. The closest Elite stepped inside, looking for signs of Halo and

the module, but stepped back out, his head tilted.

"The traitor is not in there, Sir." he spoke.

The Colonel stared with his mouth open, eager to hear the news, but when the Elite reported exactly opposite, he frowned.

"What!?" he shouted, stepping forward, "how could he escape!? Find him! Search every place on this ship. I want that Traitor and that A.I.!!!"

Captain Anderson just closed her eyes, letting out a held breath, her heart finally deciding to start operating again. Halo made it. She hoped he had enough sense to get off the ship somehow and just run.

"Oh hell...."

Halo was lost.

## 9. Chapter 9

Samantha trudged down the hall, her squad following close behind as she had her assault rifle raised at the ready. She was watching the motion detector out of one eye, avoiding groups of Elites altogether. Against a group of more than three, she was sure none of them would survive it. She had just barely managed to get her armor on when she was forced to kill two Elites on her own, and through plain luck, managed to find her squad, already in their gear and searching for their commander. When they met, they nearly shot each other. And now they found themselves rushing through the halls. Reports over the network stated that that Covenant were coming from the Sword of Damocles, and they were trying to get to the docking bay to join with the other marines holding down their position. They couldn't afford to let any more of the Covenant onto their ship.

Simmons held his shotgun at the ready, holding up the rear as he looked left and right, glancing over his shoulder every now and then. He was sure they were going to be ambushed, and kept an ever watchful eye. He heard some thumping going down the darkened hallway, then frowned.

"Marines on your six!" he shouted, opening fire.

The blast of the shotgun made short work of many of the Grunts storming to their position, the others turning around to give him cover fire. Screams filled the air as the Grunts fell to the ground, and to their utter dismay, two red armored Elites were bringing up the rear. It took a few bullets, and a few dodges of plasma, but the two Elites fell to the ground in a heap, the Grunts remaining suddenly becoming confused at what to do, and were easy prey. When the last one hit the ground in a pool of his own blood, Samantha ordered her squad to resume their path. Simmons reloaded while Panda kept an eye on the motion detector.

The lifts were out of the question, and instead they took the stairs. They could hear the heavy footsteps of Elites directly above them. Samantha motioned for her squad to remain silent, heading down as many levels as they could without making a noise. A broken piece of



metal fell off of the railing as Simmons passed by it, and there were loud grunts of confusion, followed by rapid footsteps leading down the stairs. The four of them quickly rushed through the nearest door they could find, sealing it from the inside, before rushing to the large observatory deck. Samantha glanced through the bay windows, spotting the raging battle of the marines vs. the Covenant. It looked like a slaughter. Grunts were falling left and right, Elites were ducking behind cover and returning fire in bursts, while the Hunters fired at anything though could with their fuel rod guns. One of the warthog's main guns were in use, sending the armor piercing rounds at the hunters, striking one very well across the torso, his partner simply firing a blast from his weapon. The Warthog exploded with a scream from the marine, the large piece of machinery falling over and taking out an otherwise useful weapon.

The explosion caused the marines to withdraw to cover further in the back, allowing the Grunts to advance, and even more of the Covenant to flood into the docking bay. Samantha cursed, turning around as she heard a group of marines keeping a hall occupied, avoiding blasts of plasma and returning fire behind a small blockade. She rushed around the hall leading around the bay windows, occasionally glancing to see what the Covenant and the marines were doing, before looking straight ahead at the group of jackals before her. She opened fire without hesitation, crouching down by the wall as her squad mates happily supported her fire.

When the two Jackals cried their final cry, two more and a black Elite rounded the corner, the Jackals firing rapidly at the Humans, while the Elite armed a plasma grenade. He rounded the corner to take a few bullets to his shield, throwing the grenade. It bounced along the floor, everyone avoiding it successfully except for Johns, who was taking care of some other Grunts that were coming up from the blocked hallway, the marines having been slain and unable to protect the hallway anylonger. He stopped when he felt something hit his leg, looking down at the grenade stuck to his leg, then quickly tried to remove it.

"Come on!" he cried, managing to dislodge it from his leg, but now it wouldn't come off of his hand.

Panda turned around, starting at Johns in a panic, trying to remove the grenade, "Cover! Cover!" he shouted, everyone diving around a corner or hitting the ground. The explosion sent a wave of heat that instantly melted the bay windows, and scorched the metal structure of the hallway. Samantha decided to use her own grenades, pulling the pin as she counted down the timer. When it was nearing the end of its life, she tossed it into the hallway, just as the Elite was advancing with his Jackals. The explosion killed the Elite instantly, sending a lifeless Jackal past them and down the hall, while the one further from it gurgled in pain, the shrapnel forced deep into its body.

"Squad! Sound off!" Samantha shouted.

"Panda!"

"Simmons!"

Understandably, there was no answer from Johns. Samantha looked back

to the scorched walls and the glass cooling off, then looked away, frowning deeply before she got back to her feet. She ran along the wall, finding the Hunters were turning the tide of battle into their favor, before she spotted the catwalk. She'd have plenty of time to grieve over the loss later, if they survived this, that is.

"Marines! That's our goal. Hopefully none of them noticed the catwalks yet!" she spoke, pointing to the catwalk high above the ten story drop, and at the end, were stairs that led all the way down, behind the Covenant forces.

The three of them avoided a few more battles coming to door at the end of the hall that led to the catwalk that lined the walls. Panda yelped a bit as he ducked a blast of plasma, hugging a nearby corner and spotted a lone Elite firing rapidly at the glass as Samantha and Simmons climbed onto the catwalk. Panda frowned, taking aim, then fired his weapon. The Elite spotted him at once, turning his plasma rifle to him, letting the bolts of plasma strike the side of the wall in front of him. He crouched, continuing his suppressing fire, managing to catch the Elite off guard. It's shield's couldn't withstand any more punishment, the last bullets striking protected skin, penetrating the metal. It shrieked as its blood spilled to the floor, and Panda quickly reloaded, finishing it off before it had a chance to recharge its shields.

Samantha looked behind her, then through the glass, seeing Panda rushing to the door, shutting it behind him as he crouched down, quickly getting back into formation. The three of them made it to the center catwalk, being sure not to make a noise and alert anyone to their presence. Making it to the other end of the football field sized bay, Samantha went down the stairs to the left, while Simmons and Panda took the right.

A Sergeant spotted fellow marines coming up from behind, realizing they had a perfect opportunity to shoot the Hunter's in the spot where it counted the most: the back. He nudged the private next to him, then got everyone's attention.

"We have some back up. On my order, everyone is going to jump up and spray the area, and cover when reloading," he spoke, hearing a crackle on his radio.

"Sergeant Powell. On my word, keep them distracted, we're almost in position." Samantha whispered, and the Serge smirked.

"Way ahead of you girl." he replied, reloading his weapon, the rocket launcher.

Simmons and Panda gave the signal that they were in position, hiding behind a crate before Sam quickly hid behind a Scorpion. The armor could give her sufficient cover, at least for a while.

"Sergeant. On three. One. Two. Three!" she whispered.

"Alright marines! Now!" he screamed, rising from the stack of crates with a dozen more marines.

They started firing at any and everything, giving the Hunters far too many targets to deal with at once. A blast from their rod guns took

out a good deal of Marines, the rest of them coming out of their hiding spots to add to the immense firefight. Samantha looked to her squad, then nodded. They sprang, firing at the backs of the Hunters, quickly bringing their shields down, the bullets finding purchase. The two of them grunted in pain, before falling forward in a heap. Samantha smiled, the rest of the marines having enough incentive now to continue their assault upon the Covenant forces. Grunts and Elites screamed in agony before falling to the ground, though the smarter Elites tossed grenades, taking out several of the marines. Panda and Simmons turned their attention to the emerging forces, making short work of them, and being careful not to accidentally hit their leader. When they stopped to reload, Samantha took up the battle, mowing down a dozen Grunts, a few Jackals, and a single Elite before she ducked behind the tank, quickly reloading.

The deafening sound of the Warthogs main guns started coming alive, quickly dispatching the flood of Covenant coming from the ship. Sergeant Powell spat, "How many of them are there?" he asked, finding a better position, then looked behind him.

"Marines! Behind us!" he shouted, so preoccupied about covering the door, that he didn't realize the group of Elites flanking their position.

The small group of marines quickly scattered while firing, trying to find new objects to hide behind. Many of them were quickly slaughtered, the closest one on the large turret of the Warthog getting it the worst. Bolts of plasma easily melted through his armor and punched holes in his body, slumping against the weapon and causing it's aim to turn on friendlies. Samantha from her cover continued firing, noticing out of the corner of her eye, the marines dropping like flies, and the one at the turret taking a few hits. Simmons moved from his cover, going to find something better, until he was sprayed with the armor piercing rounds from the turrets. He cried out, slumping to the floor while a pool of blood flowed from under him.

"Simmons!" Samantha shouted, that one moment of distraction allowing an Elite to raise a Needler at her.

She whipped her rifle up, pulling the trigger. Her eyebrows lifted when she heard a loud click, just before the Elite fired. She tried her best to get back behind cover, her scream filling the air as splatters of blood struck the wall. Panda could only watch helplessly, seeing his commander slump to the ground, needles sticking out of her body. He lifted his rifle, aiming the sights, then pulled the trigger. The Elite that killed Samantha crumpled to the ground like a sack of potatoes, another one taking his place. Panda lined the sights again, pulling the trigger. Nothing happened. He squeezed the trigger a few more times. His weapon couldn't have been empty... did it jam?

Two Grunts jumped in front of him, raising their pistols. He dropped his weapon, lifting his empty hands before an Elite walked up to him, striking him across the head with his rifle. He fell to the ground, everything going black.

"Where are we?" Halo asked, his voice asking with a definite hint of irritation.

"It's difficult for me to pin point our precise location. I have access to the map sub-systems and am monitoring your progress with my sensors, or if I could be plugged into your armor somehow, I could help much better in that way. But seeing how our technology isn't compatible, I'm trying my best." Katrina spoke, a bit irritated herself.

Halo just moved down the halls, trying to bring what he could up from memory about the ships layout. He had clued in that he needed to get off of the ship, and somehow find more Humans to deliver the A.I., or be captured, have a deformed body, and finally tortured to death. He liked the Human idea much better.

"Wait wait! I'm picking up short burst radio transmissions. It sounds like a coordinated attack. Variances in the transmission can only be because of the interference of many objects within the room. I am triangulating the position of it. It is coming from Docking Bay A. That's on the other side of the ship. Docking Bay B is one hundred meters in front of you. If we can get to that, there is an airlock that I can operate to get us outside of the ship."

"Outside?" he asked in surprise.

"No one will think to find you out there."

"Maybe," he growled, thinking about it for a few moments. She was right, it would be the last place to look. Now he just needed the air pack attachment for Covenant armor, suddenly realizing something, "err... I can't My armor is cut and fractured at many places... It won't seal in... air."

Katrina rumbled softly, then cursed, "Dammit. You are right. Maybe we can hide in Docking Bay B then."

Halo nodded slowly, rushing to the end of the hall and peeking around the corner, finding it clear, heading further into the darkness. He touched the side of his helmet, two black lenses falling over his eyes, reflecting a red color. He could see much clearer in darkness, and found himself taking a maze of hallways, trying not to go through the same area twice. He came to another junction, looking to the left and right, then spotted the bay windows of Docking Bay B. Fortunately the battle wasn't here, and a quick glance showed there were only a few patrols walking around inside the bay. He looked around for a lift or flight of stairs or something he could use to get to the main deck level. After searching for a few minutes, he found some stairs, running down them before hearing Covenant voices down the hall. He crouched down a bit, peeking around the corner, and spotted six red armored Elites patrolling the area. He closed his eyes slowly. Surely they must have heard the order for his capture, and Katrina new he was thinking of a way to get past them.

Halo simply growled, wanting to bang his head on the wall in frustration, before he heard some of the Human's shouting, and gunfire erupt, turning his head to the direction of the noises. There was a large explosion, and then frowned from the sound the type of weapon used to make such an explosion was heard.

"A Hunter?" he asked, frowning a bit more, rushing along the wall before he stuck his head into the bay.

His head was pulled back sharply as bullets struck the wall right beside him, ducking down quickly before he raised the assault rifle in his hands. He peeked again, seeing the towering and massive size of the hunter, his weapon firing once more before he heard the distinctive sound of the Fuel Rod Gun starting to recharge for another two bursts. The marines trapped inside the Bay did their best to hide behind large metal crates, occasionally peeking their heads out and raising their weapons to squeeze off a few shots.

Another explosion, followed by a scream this time, filled the air. Halo frowned, twisting himself slightly, accidentally hitting the button on his watch, his human facade disappearing before he looked once more. He recognized the marines as one of the few that were assigned to his level, to keep his existence a secret. The words of them trying to call for backup fell upon their deaf ears. Even Katrina was having problems trying to contact anyone. The Hunter merely grunted, rushing forward and knocking down some of the crates, a Human screaming loudly as one of the large crates fell on top of him, crushing many vital parts of his body. The others merely ran for it, getting behind the Hunter and firing at the weakest part of its body, its back. It only took a few shots, but the lucky bullet plunged deep into its body, severing the spinal cord and causing him to fall forward, gurgling something in the form of last words.

Halo sighed in relief, watching the five of the marines slowly step into the open, still cautious, and unfortunately couldn't do anything about their fallen comrade. His screams had died down, and he remained lifeless. Before the marines could count their blessings, however, one suddenly struck a crate, yelping loudly as he slumped to the ground as the next one was struck rather fiercely, stumbling to the side and landing in a heap. The third and fourth, however, were struck firmly in the guts, doubling them over before the last marine was lifted into the air by his neck, firing wildly, and seemingly hitting nothing. He was soon dropped a few short moments later, an image appearing of what attacked them. It was a Black Elite. He was simply toying with them.

Before the Elite could do anything else, Halo suddenly ran into the area, raising his rifle, and squeezing the trigger. The Elite looked to him, suddenly disappearing as Halo fired at thin air, following what he thought would be the path the Elite had taken. His eyes went wide when he heard rapid clicks, looking down to the counter on his rifle. It read zero. He looked around quickly, holding the weapon raised still as he made a slow circle around the marine gasping for breath. He recognized Halo, and unfortunately couldn't do anything to help him.

The Black Elite appeared once again, standing off to the side, drawing his plasma sword before turning it on.

"Here!" the soldier gasping for breath cried out, sliding a magazine towards the Covenant.

Halo ejected the magazine, watching it fall towards the floor, and was already in the process of kneeling down and outstretching a hand for the magazine that was headed his way. The Elite merely watched curiously, twirling his sword a bit, while Halo clutched the magazine, lifting it up and forcing it into the stock of the rifle. He yanked the bolt back to load the next bullet, then lifted his weapon and stared at where the Elite was.

No one was there, only the blue sword of the Elite was stuck into the floor, slowly melting the metal. Halo took a quivering breath, moving the weapon all over the place, ready to fire it in a heartbeat if he needed to. Katrina then spoke up through his helmet.

"Halo! I patched into your armor's comm. link, I can talk to you like this without anyone hearing. It was a struggle hacking Covenant technology though. Fried a few things in the process. Too bad your unit is busted or else I could listen in on the Covenant's directly." Katrina spoke rather proudly of herself.

"Hush!" he growled, continuing to walk around the area, looking for anything out of place.

"Oh, sensors indicated that the Elite isn't here. It's like he simply vanished." Katrina spoke.

Halo just lifted his head a bit, beginning to lower the weapon and then looked to his hands. He blinked, quickly fumbling to press the button on his watch before looking to the marine, frowning and tilting his head a bit.

"H-Halo," he spoke, coughing a bit before he slowly got to his feet, "I never thought I'd be so glad to see a Covenant before in my life."

Halo frowned slightly, titling his head before placing the rifle into a confused marine's hands, "Here," he growled, before stepping back, turning around as he started padding off, glaring at the plasma saber sticking into the ground. His hand slowly wrapped around it, sliding it out of the floor, then lifted it into the air and looked it over.

"Halo... take it," he offered the rifle back, "you won't last too long with just that."

Halo frowned once more, shrugging off the rifle. He still had the pistol he took out of the Captain's weapon storage, but he knew that wouldn't last very long. He just sighed before he looked at the ground behind the burn mark. There was a grey and black box which caught his attention. Quite thin with a few prongs and a large triangle on the front. He smirked.

"I'll be... fine," he growled, placing the small module into a hidden slot in the armor, pressing a symbol at the front of his armor that really didn't stand out. He just prayed the armor would accept it.

His image flickered a bit, before he disappeared, the module providing a wonderful cloak that made him all but disappear completely. The marine looked a little taken back, then frowned, unable to see the Covenant move away from him, only knowing he was walking away because the plasma saber was still glowing a bright blue.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, watching another of his marines start to wake.

"Don't know," Halo growled simply, turning off the weapon, then

clipped the handle to his side before he deactivated the weapon, padding out of the bay without the marine noticing.

## 10. Chapter 10

Colonel McPherson watched the bridge of the Raven's Shield carefully. The crew were forced to work at gunpoint, adjusting course to bring the ship on the proper trajectory to Farthern Star, and informed that any failure on their part would be met with a swift execution. It took three crew members before everyone got it through their head. All was according to plan. They would land as scheduled, and simply wait for the rest of the fleet to arrive before melting down the engines of the ship. Countless lives would be lost by the assault, and any trace of them on Farthern Star would quickly be wiped out. The effects of such an assault would be immense. No records of the Covenant still remaining on the planet, and any hope for the Humans to discover the location of their home world would be lost.

He looked to the Captain, then crossed his arms as blue Elites padded by them, growling a bit and looking over star charts. He was confident the plan to find Halo and the A.I. would succeed, it was only a matter of time. His troops were scowering the entire ship, looking for him, but he had to urge, several times, that time was of the essence. He wondered where he could be. The Captain remained defiant, trying not to assist the Colonel in anyway, but the lives of her crew were more important. Reluctantly she gave them orders on approach.

The Sword of Damocles was soon detached from the Raven's Night, sent on its own way, the course set so it would burn up in the atmosphere of planet Farthern Star. That ship was useless. Nothing more than a decoy, and its usefulness was over. The crew would perish upon re-entry. All was according to plan. The Colonel turned when an Elite walked up behind him and bowed, started growling. Halo had avoided capture several times, and last reports stated that he had managed to salvage an invisibility module from a fallen Elite. The Colonel was not happy about this. It only meant that it would take more time. With twenty minutes to re-entry.... He grabbed the Elite by the throat, growling loudly.

"I don't care what it takes, but I want that Traitor captured and retrieved. That A.I. is more important than the traitor!" he shouted, the Elite cowering in the grip of his commander.

"Y-Yes Sir..." he managed to gasp, stumbling back when he was released, and quickly rushed off.

"Where the hell are you, Halo?" he asked himself, before a red armored Elite approached him.

"Sir. We have discovered that the A.I. is using a remote link up to the ships systems. We managed to triangulate the position of the A.I, and is currently moving towards the rear of the ship. We can only assume the Traitor still has it."

The Colonel smiled cruelly, then patted the Elite's back, "Good work.. I want you to send your best soldiers to go and capture the Traitor. But when he passes out from having lost his arms and legs, I want him to be immediately woke so he can see his beloved Humans

die."

"Sir, there is one other thing. The link up is getting interference, and we are losing their position whenever there is this interference. It does not look like it is steady, completely random. It may hinder our capture of the Traitor."

The Colonel nodded slowly, then rubbed his chin. He pondered why there would be such interference in the first place, then nodded once to the Elite. He bowed, then zipped off, ordering a group of Elites on the bridge to follow him. They headed down the stairs, while the Colonel merely smirked at the Captain.

"Not long now. You put all of your faith into the Traitor, and in the end, he will fail." he spoke smugly, watching her frown, then spit at him.

"He will not let me down," she warned, scrambling back when the Colonel moved to her, and yelped when she was pulled to her feet, staring into his eyes, "I hope I live long enough to see Halo choke the life out of you."

The Colonel grinned slowly, taking her by the neck, "I bet you do, Captain," he growled, tossing her back onto her rump.

"Dammit, Halo, will you stop using that cloak for a few minutes?" Katrina spoke, highly agitated at him, "how many times do I have to tell you, that Covenant cloak is interfering with my transmissions."

Halo sighed softly, and wished that Katrina hadn't patched into his armor's comm link to speak to him directly. She was getting on his nerves. Right now, he was inside a storage room for food, his back to the wall as he watched the door like a hawk. It was a good place for cover, for now, and Katrina was busy with her own thing. Finding locations of the marines. Many were still fighting, the ones that were captured, were forced into the lower levels, and locked there. She was about to suggest the armory, however, explosives were rigged on the entrances. Anyone who even touched one, would set off an enormous charge, destroying any viable weapon to use. Not like it mattered, considering a group of Elites were guarding the lifts and the stairs from the lower levels.

Halo just didn't know what to think. He was sure the Humans could handle themselves, but with large casualties, and he was stuck in the mess hall, several levels below the bridge, and at the opposite side of the ship. His only weapon: his plasma rifle, and he was dismayed to find it almost empty. Since no Human could figure out how to recharge the weapons, he doubted he would find any facility to do so, while Katrina's report of the Sword of Damocles breaking away from the Raven's Shield, he wouldn't be able to try and find a Covenant ship which had such equipment.

Before too long, Halo was busy searching the area for something to eat and drink. He was starving, and he needed to get his energy up. With only a few hours of sleep, he was at a disadvantage. He sorted through the shelves, finding many canned goods, before finding a large container, filled with his synthetically made food. He frowned a bit, opening the container before using his hands to scoop in large amounts of the gelatin. Katrina was going to mention something about



using manners, but she understood he was starving. He was her last hope, after all.

Finishing up, he found a large bottle of water, drinking it greedily. His small feast was quickly brought to an end as he heard several footsteps down the hall, and loud growls. He backed into the corner, raising his plasma rifle.

"Are you done?" Halo asked, flicking his finger over the trigger, just starting to see the tip of a plasma saber pass by the door, not to mention his heart beating faster and faster.

"Done, hit it!" she advised, feeling her link cut off as Halo touched the module.

He disappeared completely, steadying his breath as Elites walked into the kitchens, looking around carefully, before one walked right up to the storage room. Halo's heart was pounding, staring at the Elite flex his jaws, searching inside of the room, and to his greatest relief, turned his attention elsewhere and began to move away, four others following him. He let out his held breath, holding his head a bit. Katrina knew this was taking its toll on the Covenant. She had been reading his life signs, and they have been fluxuating ever since the Colonel's intentions were revealed. She wondered if she should tell him that they were about to enter orbit, and had only five minutes left until re-entry. Halo just closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the wall.

"Halo... why do they want you so bad?" Katrina finally asked, observing that the Covenant were purposely going out of their way to find him.

"Besides you?" he replied, clearing his throat, "a Covenant going against the teachings... is considered a sin to all Covenants. It is their greatest threat, having someone abandon them. It could inspire others, and so... I will be shown to all, with... insides lying at my feet."

"Oh my," Katrina spoke quietly, hearing the nervousness within Halo's voice. The way he spoke about it, it was the one fate that scared any Covenant to death, "why did you defect in the first place?"

Halo frowned a bit, then thought about that for a long moment before he answered, "Don't... know why. I couldn't... help it."

"I don't understand you at all."

"It may not matter too much longer," he growled, feeling the ship start to shake as he grabbed hold of the shelves, steadying himself.

"We're attempting re-entry. The drop ship has disconnected from the ship. We're stuck in the drop ship now," Katrina spoke thoughtfully, knowing they were to land as scheduled, but Halo's safety was more important. She would remain blind to the computer systems on board so he could secure his safety, "everything should go smoothly if the computers are still programmed to land according to your plan. But if there are that many Covenant there to warrant five battle ships.... I'm afraid we might have long to survive."

"But Farthern Star does have ways of sending out distress signals..." Halo growled, pulling his feet away from heavy containers almost falling on them.

"Yes, that is true. When we land... our first priority is to get off of this ship, and make it to the antennae rays. I can call us some more backup, but it means we will have to keep alive until all of them show up. Closest vessel, I estimate at a little under three hours before they land on Farthern Star."

Halo lowered his head a bit, then nodded. So the next four hours of his life were going to be very well tested. He hoped his faith would not let him down. He whimpered when the shelf he was holding onto suddenly fell, trapping him underneath, and covering him in small cans. He squirmed a bit, getting his legs free and backed himself further into the corner, hearing several orders through the halls to find places to secure themselves. It didn't make him feel any better about being huddled in a corner. Then an idea of inspiration hit him. With everyone in a rush to get off of their feet, he bolted out of the door, following the directions of Katrina to a tee, on his way to the docking bay.

The Colonel held onto the console in front of him as the ship rocked and shook, the Captain braced against the underside of the console while her crew navigated the ship, to keep everyone alive through this. A few of the Elite's were rocking a bit, some tumbling over from some sudden turbulence, the Colonel simply watching the glowing of heat from re-entry through the large view port. This moment of tenseness lasted for several minutes, until the bright light from the sun shone through. It was well in its way to night fall, the Captain noticing it would be daylight for at least an hour before the sun disappeared over the horizon. If Halo could make it off the ship and to safety under two hours, she was sure no one would ever find him again. He was doing a good job of hiding on a contained ship where it was well lit, and knew that he would simply disappear under the cover of night.

The Colonel stared at the atmosphere, it's dark blue blending into a deep red, before smirking. Ever so closer to finding out the location of planet Earth. When Farthern Star failed to provide a location, this was his last chance to retrieve it for the Elders, and he would fail them not. The Captain just felt that weight on her shoulders, of time running out upon seeing the Colonel's malicious grin. It was obvious the Colonel needed her crew to pilot the ship to land safely, but after that, they were no longer needed, and she had the feeling that everyone else felt the same way.

Halo ran into the docking bay, where just an hour before, was an intense firefight. He stared at the bodies and the scorching of the walls and equipment, Katrina informing him that any vehicles here were severely damaged. He'd have to be going on foot as soon as the ship touched down. But to his understanding, the docking bay doors were quite high on the ship. He couldn't just jump down.

"How do I... get out?" he growled, examining every glowing light on the walls, wondering if he could operate something to help him down, or at least find a rope or a line to repel down with.

"You're standing on it," Katrina spoke, as Halo jumped back.

He could make out the large square he was standing on, noticing how big it was, then nodded with resolve.

>"I'll try, but I think I can still patch into the main boards via remote to lower the lift. It doesn't move all that fast, so I suggest you find some place to hide while I start to hack into my own systems." Katrina warned, as Halo quickly hid behind a tank, noticing splatters of blood next to him. He frowned, seeing the Needler's projectiles on the ground, and wondered who was unfortunate enough to have been hit by one. He touched the module, his Human image appearing to make it look like he was at least smaller, and quivered in breath while Katrina promptly started to work her magic.<p>

Samantha awoke with a start, suddenly clutching at her chest as she coughed loudly. Panda was there, tying bandages around every spot a needle had once been, and fell back in alarm. Marines were all around her, some getting first aid kits and rushing to her side, while she looked around with wide eyes.

"Halo?" she asked, gripping Panda's shoulder tightly, then looked to him, "where is he?"

"I... I don't know," he spoke honestly, wiping the blood from her neck as she felt the ship shake a bit.

"We're in Farthern Star's atmosphere..." she spoke in wonder, before some medical officers looked her over.

They began to do a better job at the bandages, replacing soiled ones, while Sergeant Powell knelt by her.

>"You're a tough girl," he spoke in his gruff voice, moving some of her hair to the side.<p>

"What happened?"

"We were overpowered. Anyone not on the bridge was escorted down here. The lifts and the stairs have been sealed. We're prisoners on our own ship," he replied and frowned, "we've also disengaged from the ship. The drop ship is well on its way down to the planet."

"Good... then he still has a hundred places to hide," she spoke with relief, remembering the sheer size of the drop ship.

Samantha let out a long breath, rubbing her face gently as she remembered her squad. She quickly looked for them, her eyes wandering about the countless number of crewmen, all of them in a deep despair, but no signs of anyone, except for Panda.

"Where is... my squad?" she asked, looking into his eyes.

He lowered his gaze, then shook his head. Samantha closed her mouth, turning her head away as she closed her eyes, saying a small prayer for her fallen friends. She opened her eyes again, her attention turning the bright red flashing lights filling the hall.

"Attention, prepare for emergency landing. Attention, prepare for emergency landing. Time to landing: five minutes." a voice spoke over the intercom

Was the ship damaged? How long had she been out? She watched Sergeant Powell standing, suddenly screaming orders at his marines. Everyone took cover as best as they could, a loud whirring being heard coming from above them.

"They're closing the blast doors of the Docking Bay," Panda spoke, hearing a few metallic scrapes and a solid sounding thud.

"What is going on!?" the Colonel shouted, watching the Captain's pilots struggle with the controls to keep the ship level.

It was no surprise that they had made a mistake with re-entry. The fear and tense moments of trying to set the ship on course had caused its nose to point down far too much. The Captain clutched the console, hearing her ensign's yelling something about a rough landing.

"Blast doors are sealed through the drop ship. Brace for impact!" one of the pilots yelled, grabbing his console and ducking his head.

The Colonel watched the terrain of the planet through the view port, finding a chair as he held onto it tightly. The ship rumbled deeply when the landing gears were operated, the ship firing its counter thrusters, and soon held the ship afloat, but it was still descending too fast. Just a few hundred more meters.

The impact shook everything and everyone within the ship. Anyone that wasn't holding onto something had firmly hit the floor, and those that did hold onto something, weren't much more safer either. Covenant and Human alike fell out of chairs and down the stairs in the ship, the engines taking the biggest impact of them all, grounding the Raven's Shield in the process. The marines in the makeshift prison were screaming and yelling as the effects of the impact thrown them about. Samantha held onto Panda as tight as she could, keeping his head covered before looking to the near by stairs. Grunt and Elite bodies fell down the stairs, some breaking their necks when they hit the bottom, while the Grunts were being crushed because of the increasing weight. It was the same at the other set of stairs as well.

"Sergeant!" she shouted, getting his attention.

"What!?" his voice sounded above the shouts.

"Order your men to pick up the weapons the Covenant has dropped. We have to get to the Docking level. It's our one chance at getting out of here!" she yelled, feeling the rumbling subside.

"Roger that!" the Sarge shouted, quickly barking out orders to the marines next to him, then rushed to the fallen Covenants, taking hold of their weapons, and began to storm up the stairs

The Colonel lifted his head from the console, closing his eyes as he slowly stood, his legs a bit shaky. Several crew members were on the floor, lifeless. Many of his own soldiers were twisted in impossible angles, but there were still quite a few of the Covenant left through the ship. He took in a long breath, noticing the Captain squirming a bit, then held her head where a big bruise resided. He cleared his throat and stood before his Elites.

>"We have landed on planet Farthern Star. Covenant forces will be on

their way to assist us, but we still need to find the A.I. and the Traitor before he gets off of his ship. The only way off of this graveyard is through the docking bay. We will wait here aboard this ship until reinforcements arrive, during that time, I want guards dispatched to the areas surrounding the Bay. If there is any chance the Humans can have, I want to take it away before they even get the idea. Move!" he spoke to a group of Elites, watching them bow and take a few Jackals and a good helping of Grunts.<p>

The Colonel growled with each breath, looking over the consoles before looking to the Captain, "Captain Anderson. I want you to display an image of what is going on in the Bay right now."

"Blow me." she hissed at him.

The Colonel narrowed his eyes, holding out his hand as a nearby Elite placed a plasma pistol into his hand. He looked to the nearest Human, promptly shooting him in the leg with it. The ensign screamed in pain, clutching his knee from the impact, the heat of the weapon burning flesh. The Captain parted her mouth, partly in shock as she stared at the Colonel, swallowing hard as she climbed to her feet, quickly typing on the keyboard. Several monitors in the bridge came to life, displaying the rather empty docking bay. The blast doors were all sealed, on every level, but the ones for the main level had very thick panes of plastic, allowing clear views inside and out, while promising to resistance to heavy impact. The glass was much stronger than metal, and much heavier as well. The Colonel smiled slyly, taking a seat as he watched the display intently, the sweeping camera showing almost all of the bay. He frowned slightly, his look turning one trying to comprehend a complex situation, and saw a Human hiding behind a tank, occasionally peeking his head out from the side of the treads to make sure no one was coming.

"Sir! Position of the A.I. is triangulated. Coming from within the Docking Bay, Sir!" an Elite promptly told his commander, warranting a slight nod.

He stood, a smile appearing across his face before he took hold of the Captain's wrist, pulling her along as he walked to the stairs.

"You are in command of the bridge until I return," he growled to an Elite, taking hold of the plasma saber hanging at his wrist, holding onto it tightly before he dragged the Captain down the stairs.

"Where are you taking me!?" the Captain demanded, struggling to keep up with the more powerful Colonel.

"I think you'll like what I have planned for you," he growled a bit more, stepping through entrance to the level when he read the sign that said 'Docking Bay Observatory'.

He had to take the long way around, considering the escape route designated by the computer had a slight malfunction upon the landing, blast doors sealing all over the ship, and many doors remaining locked to prevent possible air leaks. Several other areas were accessible again, which were dutifully guarded by the rest of the Covenant forces on board, keeping the Humans right where they should be, if they managed to escape their prison and try to storm the

bridge. He made it to the catwalks, taking the long way around, glancing at Halo every now and then. It perplexed him why he would be hiding like that, until he heard the warning sirens within the bay.

'Docking Bay doors opening. Stand clear. Docking Bay doors opening. Stand clear.'

Halo jumped at this, staring at the double set of doors starting to open, mechanical noise filling the air along with loud buzzers, and soon, the first few beams of sunlight started to pour in. He growled softly, wondering if everyone on the ship knew where he was now.

"How is that... help me?" his voice was irritated, hoping Katrina would activate the main lift.

"Sorry. Systems took a knock upon landing. I'm trying my best," she spoke, deactivating the doors, searching through the sub-systems, "okay. Stand back, I'm lowering the lift. Crap... just a few more minutes."

There were suddenly bangs on the large walls of plastic and metal, causing Halo to spin around, raising his pistol as he stared at a battle beginning to unfold behind the door. At least a hundred marines were battling with one quarter that of Covenant, stray shots hitting the plastic, not even making a scratch, but just a slight burn with the plasma that struck it. He frowned a bit, and had to concern himself with his escape.

Samantha pulled herself up the stairs, clutching at her chest, knowing she was leaking again, but that didn't stop her for the final hurrah. She was a soldier first, and if God decided it was her time, then today she would die fighting for the Human race. She shouted, raising a plasma rifle, and fired a few shots at two approaching Elites, dropping one while the rest of the marines stormed down the halls. Many of them didn't have weapons, save for make shift weapons like pipes and chivs. Despite the far better weaponry of the Covenant, they were slowly and surely winning the battle, and making it closer to the main level of the Docking Bay. One more level. Samantha led a charge up the stairs, firing at anything that moved, particularly Grunts and Jackals, the marines following her picking up the weapons dropped by those slain and turning them onto other hapless soldiers.

"So close," she whispered, firing once more before the barrel of the weapon starting steaming quite violently. It was also quite hot to the touch. She rolled it over in her hands as she took cover, hearing the screams of Human and Covenant alike, waiting for the weapon to cool before she gripped it again.

A full stream of automatic fire sent bolts of plasma through the air, striking down a few more Elites in the way, before she turned the corner, seeing the main entrance of the Docking Bay, and the blast doors sealed shut. She started firing at the glass, watching some of the bolts bounce off of the material, before the weapon stopped firing. It was empty. She tossed it to the side, pounding on the glass firmly before she spotted Halo, standing near the main lift. She looked up a bit, spotting the Colonel, dragging the Captain along the top parts of the catwalk, and quietly started to take the stairs

down. Halo didn't even notice them.

She banged on the glass firmly, screaming at Halo to hide, but to her dismay, she realized he could hear nothing of what she was screaming about, or even tell that she was hitting the glass. Sgt. Powell rushed up behind her, seeing the lone marine inside of the Bay, then frowned before he looked to the other armed marines catching up.

"Marines, on my order, fire at this glass. We have to get in there and keep the A.I. from harm!" he shouted, lifting his weapon before Samantha struck the glass again.

"I already tried that. These doors can survive large scale explosions. We have to find some way to open it up. Panda!" she cried out, looking all over the place, then found Panda, grabbing him by the collar and dragging him to the control panel, "Panda, I need you to get these doors open."

"Y-yes ma'am," he spoke, squirming out of her grip before he looked over the panel. It was normally reserved for reading biological signs of the higher ups, but anything could be hot wired if done correctly.

"Sergeant. I want you to find other hackers to try to get the doors on the sides open as well," she spoke, looking back through the glass, and Halo impatiently waiting for something. The Colonel was busy with his own thing, namely, holding the Captain over the edge of the small balcony, maybe twenty feet above the floor.

"Got it! We're out of here!" Katrina cheered into Halo's ear.

Yellow lights lit up along the floor, another siren filling the air as the sound of mechanical whirring filled the air.

"Yesss," Halo hissed, watching the platform start to descend, hearing a loud scream from above.

It was the Captain, held over the edge of the small balcony by her neck. She kicked a bit, holding onto the hand around her throat as much as possible before the Colonel smirked widely, staring at the lone Covenant in the middle of the Bay.

"Drop your weapons, or I drop her," the Colonel spoke, gripping her neck tighter.

Halo tilted his head slowly, the platform sinking more and more, his grip tensing and relaxing around the handle of the plasma rifle.

"Halo... we don't have time to think. We have to go, I can't stop the lift." Katrina said with urgency.

>"But... have to help... Captain." he growled in a whisper, still fighting the battle within his mind that started about a few seconds ago. Help the Captain, or save his own life.<p>

"What's it going to be, Halo?" the Colonel asked, lifting her higher. She cried out, croaking for breath as she started to grow more limp, and looking down at the lift. It moved further down, the sounds of an airlock opening, and soon he could see the land just barely through

the crack, before the pit was highlighted by the sunshine. It was well on its way down, and if he were to jump, he could survive the fall. But the Captain.

The Colonel stared at Halo, watching him fight with the decision, the Captain gurgling for breath before she bared her teeth.

"Run..." she croaked, choking louder as the grip around her neck tightened.

Halo immediately held up a hand, tossing the pistol into the opening, and then the plasma saber, watching it bounce off of the platform, and fall to the ground. It was a long fall, and he'd never be able to make the jump now. The Colonel chuckled, then let go of the Captain. She fell to the deck, falling over twenty feet, and landing with a thud as she rolled onto her back. She clutched at a leg, pathetic mewling being heard as the pain of a broken leg racked her body. Halo frowned at this, looking back up to the Colonel, who leaned forward against the rail.

"Halo, Halo, Halo," he growled, waving a finger at him, "I'm glad it was I who managed to confront you. After all, it would only be right that the one that brings you in be someone you know."

Halo parted his mouth a bit, frowning some more before he growled, "What you mean?"

"That's right... your memories were taken from you," McPherson spoke, baring his teeth a bit.

Samantha could only watch the two, hoping for some kind of miracle now to let Halo escape. Panda fiddled around with a few more wires, and after a sharp crackle, he yelped, pulling his hands back and shaking them quickly. She fretted her brow, though started hearing the sounds from inside of the Bay. Panda had shorted out the intercom system, allowing them to hear everything that was going on inside.

"You know me?" Halo asked, stepping back slowly, the Colonel merely laughing.

"Of course I do. I know all about you. In fact, I couldn't let you die here today on this ship. Being bound and beaten so roughly by the Humans you thought were your friends," he spoke and smirked widely, "it wasn't your fault though, your trust made you feel safe around them. I know this about you, you trust far too easily. So much in fact... some results of your trust, were very bad, restless nights."

"You know about my nightmares?" Halo asked in confusion.

"Especially about your nightmares, and your last mission on Icenein, before you were captured."

Halo stepped back again, shaking his head, "How... that possible?"

"Yes... how is it possible?" Samantha whispered, staring at Halo's posture betray him.



He was scared.

## 11. Chapter 11

"Three years ago, you and your squad of Elites landed upon a once believed deserted planet to survey it's conditions to see if it could maintain Covenant life, and also house a way point for our fleet, much like planet Reach does so for the Humans. During the mission, the indigenous wild life there had killed four of your team mates, but then something happened. You ran into the one that that the Covenants fear. The Flood. The rest of your team continued through the lands, meeting more and more of the creatures, and one by one, each one of your team mates were captured by the Flood and quickly changed into one of them. You barely made it back to the ship before you were over run with the Flood, but you came back a different person, Halo. At first, you wanted revenge on the Flood, taking charge of command, and had the entire planet's surface carpet bombed with fission bombs. Our last reports from the scanners indicate that not even bacteria survived the assault.

For your bravery, you were to be promoted to the rank of Gold. An astounding feat. Surviving a Flood attack is quite the extraordinary abilities of a Gold the Elder's like to see, and your quick dealing with our sworn enemies. For that you were commended. But you may have left the planet without so much as a scratch, only to have your mind scarred by the incident.

I know about your dreams, Halo."

Halo simply stared at the Colonel, watching him explain a bit of the story, though blinked a few times and tilted his head. He didn't buy the story. The Flood? But the dreams.

"Yes, the dreams... nightmares, really. Nightmares so terrible you never slept a good night once in the last three years. And that, affected your battle performance. Against a group of Humans, of all creatures, you nearly got wiped out with your squad. Thoughts of your fallen comrades. Being pulled into the mass of infection, screaming and begging the Gods for mercy. How was it, Halo? To see the Flood's tentacles invade your comrades, twisting their bodies and their souls for its own purposes? You see them now, don't you!? What about the Elites and Grunts you led on their suicide mission. How did their faces look when they were annihilated by the Human forces because you failed to carry out your duty?"

Halo stepped back again, blinking a bit. He did see those faces in his dreams, faces he couldn't see clearly screaming and begging him not to let them die. Samantha just stared in shock. Halo had admitted to her the events in his dreams when he could, and somehow the Colonel knew about them too, but it was apparent he knew much more about why the dreams were there in the first place. Everyone was dead silent, listening to the story of the Colonel. None of which could believe their ears. The Captain also, silencing her quick gasps of breath as she clutched at her leg, stared in wide eyes as Halo was beginning to fold.

"It was because of this that you were under constant surveillance. Your wandering faith had the Elder's concerned. In short, we couldn't trust you. You underwent a procedure to wipe your memory, regarding

past events, the Flood, and of course, critical information regarding our Home World. You were ready for your last assignment. The one that lead you here, on this Human ship. Do you know what the purpose of this last mission was?"

Halo merely shook his head, stepping back once again, his back almost against the glass.

"To retrieve the most valued possession of the Human fleets. It's A.I. Your wandering faith was disturbing to the Elder's, and they were concerned you wouldn't be able to serve our Gods any longer, so you were sent on this last mission. Placed into a situation where you would feel compassion for the Humans. And compassion you did feel. Your time in the soup was well worth it. We altered a bit of your psyche in the process, so you would react to a group of Humans being mindlessly slaughtered. Unfortunately, you reacted just too well. Your commander for that mission only a short while ago, was a good soldier, and I was sorry for having to sacrifice him. But his death is not in vain. Not when you carry the A.I. on you right now."

Halo placed a hand on his back, feeling the compartment in thought.

Hundreds of thousands Covenant had died trying to retrieve that little box you have right now, and I would have to say this mission was successful. Admittedly the hardest part was faking being a Human, but here I am now. It has served our people well. Luck would have it, that the Sword of Damocles was in the area as well, and in the confusion of the attack on Reach, we boarded that ship with little trouble. This is the gadget," the Colonel spoke, smiling widely as he tapped a small box on the side of his hip.

Halo stepped back again, panting a bit as he felt the glass behind him. He dared not move his gaze away from the Colonel, trying to piece together what he had said.

"You... used me," he growled, frowning slightly at the realization.

"Of course I did. You didn't think sending you to that Human colony for no apparent reason was a bit odd? Of course you did, but then again, you always followed orders blindly. Your faith was always in the mission. But did it suit you well when you were sent to that planet of the Flood? That one and only time you met the Flood and began your path of distrust to our Gods. That was the beginning of the Covenant's greatest plan yet. Years of work to produce the greatest Judas that Humans had ever known! And as I recall, you were more than happy to accept the assignment on Icenein to prove your loyalty."

Halo turned his gaze away, frowning visibly before he closed his eyes. That planet. Pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle, floated in his mind almost all of the time. He didn't know if he should believe the Colonel, but the pictures that he sometimes drew, made him think there was no reason not to.

"With your collapsing faith, we wanted to make an example of you as well. Those that betray the Gods, even despite acquiring the most important part of this war, would still not be shown an ounce of mercy. Your body displayed will be inspiration to the rest of our

kind not to betray our Elders."

The Captain leaned back against a crate, holding her leg tightly before she swallowed, feeling a few beads of sweat fall down her face.

"Why the Sword of Damocles?" she grunted, gasping loudly before the Colonel looked to her.

"Glad you could join the conversation," the Colonel spoke, slowly turning his head towards her, reveling in the sight of her pain," The Sword of Damocles was quite a simple choice really. It could have been say... your General I would want to take the role of, but no no, I wanted the ship, and it just so happened Colonel McPherson, commanded that ship. Quite the womanizer as well, and I admit I had to use the toilet more than once during my time as this wretched Human."

The Captain coughed a bit, shaking her head a bit, "That doesn't answer why you wanted the ship. It is tactically inferior to this ship."

The Colonel merely cleared his throat.

"There once was a king who's name is Dionysius. He was so unjust and cruel that he won himself the name of Tyrant. He knew that almost everybody hated him, and so he was always in dread, unless someone should take his life. But he was very rich, and lived in a fine palace where there were many beautiful and costly things. He was waited upon by a host of servants who were always ready to do his bidding. One day a friend of his, whose name was Damocles, said to him: How happy you must be. You have everything that any man could wish.

"Perhaps you would like to know what it is like." replied the tyrant.

"No, not that, my king," Damocles said, "but I think that, if I could only have your riches and your pleasures for one day, I should not want any greater happiness."

"Very well," said the tyrant, "you shall have them."

And so, the next day, Damocles was led into the palace, and all of the servants were ordered to treat him as their master. He sat down at a table in the banquet hall, where rich foods were placed before him. There was no want that could give him pleasure. He had all of his wants before him. The wines, the music, colorful flowers, the servants. Resting upon soft cushions, he felt like the happiest man in all the world.

Eventually, his gaze tilted towards the ceiling. A sharp sword hung above his head, nearly touching it, dangling by only one horse hair. The hair, could break at any moment. There was a danger that every moment it would do so. Damocles lost his smile, and cared not for the music, or the wine, or the riches or the servants or the beautiful flowers. He longed to leave the palace.

What is the matter, asked the tyrant. Damocles, pale in the face, cried, That sword! That sword!. He dared not move. The tyrant calmly

walked up to his friend, and spoke: Yes, I know there is a sword above your head, and that it may fall at any moment. But why should that trouble you? I have a sword over my head all of the time. I am every moment in dread unless something may cause me to lose my life.

Damocles hands shook, and after swallowing his pride, said: I now see that I was mistaken, and that the rich and powerful are not so happy as they seem. Let me go back to my old home in the poor little cottage among the mountains.

And so as long as he lived, he never again wanted to be rich, or change places with the king."

"Fourth century B.C." the Captain whispered in shock, "how did you?"

"How did I know about it? My dear Captain. You of all should realize that good Commanders know as much about their enemy as possible. And I have a particular interest in history. An obsession, if you will. But, you couldn't know more about us than you could see from the outside, thanks to erasing Halo's memory. All you found out is a few tactics, a bit of his religion, a Covenant's habits, and other miniscule things. Perhaps... hmmm, " he chuckled softly, "mating habits as well. Though I'm sure only one Human really knows about that."

Halo just turned his gaze away, Samantha going wide eyed and hoping no one saw her face turning red. The Captain just sneered at him, bringing something like that up at a time like this.

"You look surprised. You didn't think I would have let Halo board this ship on his own, did you? It was rather... interesting, to read some of my spy's reports. Oh, and you should meet him. He really is a charmer, once you get to know him." he spoke, looking around, "you may show yourself."

There was silence, the Colonel looking about, searching for the invisible Elite. The Captain and Halo both glanced about as well, the Covenant wondering if that was the one who saved him from the Humans. Many long moments went by, silence filling the air, before the Colonel frowned.

"It seems he may have been discovered and killed," he spoke quietly, then looked to the Captain, "but still, the knowledge he learned of is more than enough to justify his sacrifice. Regardless. I know your species quite well, and that story has always held a special place in my heart. It is exactly the reason why I wanted the ship named after the fool Damocles."

"Why? What does that ship prove?"

"Why indeed," he paused, then smiled cruelly at the Captain, "because Halo was your race's sword! In fact, your race and Halo share the same fate. I can see his sword hanging over his head at this very moment, as well as yours, Captain. You amount to the status of kings, but you all wear a crown of a bladed weapon atop of your heads that goes unnoticed until it is all too late. What more fitting image can there be? The weapon: Halo. Crafted into a Human weapon, hanging over each of your heads. And now, what was once myth, is now fact. The

A.I. is mine, and soon the swords over your heads will fall."

The Captain just lowered her head, closing her eyes as the words struck home. It certainly seemed that way. Halo, oblivious to the harm he could do, has brought the destruction of the Human race. Every Human aboard the ship, had also heard about this, Panda and the ones working on the door having to stop to listen. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

"But, I'm afraid time is running out for me. We should finish things while we have the chance, Halo," the Colonel spoke, pressing the small module, the appearance of the Colonel fading, and soon an Elite dressed in gold armor stood on the small balcony. He growled lowly, his face contorting into a grin, while Halo simply stared at him in shock.

"J'Kress!" he spoke in disbelief.

>"Yes, it is I," he spoke, flexing his hand as he pointed towards the shocked Covenant before him, "you know, I always wondered who was the better soldier between the both of us, Halo. Today is a perfect day to find out," he spoke, his arms parting out to the side.<p>

The Captain panted softly, listening to the Elite's speech, still in Human. She wondered if he also had an advanced translator on his person. But just seeing that Elite made her hands tremble. This was it, what seem like the defining point in the Human races fate. J'Kress jumped from the balcony, landing with a heavy thud before the opening for the lift, then looked down, admiring the scenery for a moment before walking around the large square hole, his eyes fixed on Halo, and the Human figure he wore.

"Amazing technology. Accident would have it that Covenant and Human technology existed so well. I'm amazed no other Humans have figured out who you were. I am only slightly discouraged about our own attempts, having been seen through by you, and I now realize that what you have is far superior. I'm sure the scientists would be extremely grateful of me retrieving that piece of machinery."

Halo moved his hand in front of him, staring at the wrist and the watch around it. He rubbed it slowly, taking in a long breath before slamming his wrist against the glass. The device shattered into several pieces, the image of the Human flickering, and finally disappearing. Soon the black armor that Halo wore stood in his place. Every marine at the window quickly stumbled back upon seeing the second Elite, hushed whispers filling the air as Sam held her hands to her chest, locking her fingers.

"Halo," she whispered, her eyes wide as he moved from the glass.

J'Kress simply sneered, removing his helmet and tossing it to the side, lifting his hand and pointing at Halo expectedly. Katrina simply watched through the sensors, Halo's vital signs showing that he was debating something. Halo just held still, flexing his hand slowly before he started to reach up for his helmet.

"You can still run," Katrina whispered, finally speaking up.

"No... I have to fight," he growled, undoing a latch on the side, "or else... we all will die."

Katrina sighed softly, understanding the battle between the two.

"Thank you, Halo," she whispered before he removed the helmet, letting it clatter to his feet. He kicked it to the side, listening to it bounce before striking the tread of a near by tank. He slowly raised his hands, clenching them into fists, prepared to stand his ground.

"Oh, by the way, Kraa," J'Kress spoke, tilting his head and making a few cracking noises at his neck, "you're the one that planed this mission from the start."

Halo just lifted his head and stared at the Gold with wide eyes.

## 12. Chapter 12

J'Kress rushed to Halo, his hands swiping through the air, watching the black armored Elite weave and dodge his attacks, with quite efficiency. Though while Halo did his best to avoid some of the attacks, he suddenly stepped back, holding his face as a well placed hit struck him in the jaws. He flexed his mandibles a bit, growling lowly before dodging another attack, this time retaliating with his own. He kicked J'Kress in the side, hopping back as he raised his fists once more, staring at the Gold as he slowly circled around him.

"Good," J'Kress growled, pointing at his comrade once again, "I was hoping this would be challenging. Punishing the sinners should always be rewarding."

Halo weaved again as his ex-partner swung a few placed kicks at him, taking one in the chest as he held it, only to be struck down by a fierce introduction to the gold's palm. He fell down to one knee, crying out as J'Kress kicked him across the face. Purple blood fell to the floor as Halo fell to the floor, gasping loudly before dragging him up to his knees. J'Kress merely walked wide circles around him, studying the Traitor for several moments, and growled in pleasure as his enemy finally got back to his feet.

J'Kress rushed in once again, swiping his hands a few times, though the final one was blocked quite firmly by Halo, a pair of knuckles smashing into his ex-partner's face. Halo spared nothing, striking J'Kress a few more times, one in the side of the head before he yelped, a wild kick landing at his abdomen before he felt another explosion of pain at his face, the material of the armor causing him to see a few stars as he stumbled back. He covered his mouth, panting heavily as he could taste his own blood, seeing his enemy rush in for another attack. He dodged to the side of a powerful leg, taking another blow to his face, though at the same managing to kick J'Kress in the side once again.

Samantha could only watch in helplessness as Halo was slowly but surely being beaten down. She didn't know if it was his lack of desire for combat, or if he really was unskilled at hand to hand combat, but whatever the reason, she knew the gold Elite named J'Kress would not stop his beating until Halo was dead. She urged

Panda to keep working, hearing him yelp again from another shock. The systems were amazing complicated for these panels, and he was going as fast as he could. He jumped visibly as Halo was slammed into the glass, a dull 'thunk' being heard before Halo slid under a fierce punch, returning a few more attacks, trying to keep on the move. Recollecting his nerve, Panda went back to trying to open the doors.

Halo unfortunately had worse luck, taking another blow to the abdomen, doubling over as he coughed for breath, only to be kicked in the back and sent to the floor once more. He rolled onto his back, his eyes clenched shut. The sounds of the rushing footsteps towards him were almost ignored from the aching around his body. He opened his eyes, just to watch J'Kress wind up and use his head like a soccer ball. He rolled out of the way effectively avoiding the kick, getting to his feet before spitting some blood onto the floor, raising his hands once again. It was then he noticed something out of the corner of his eye.

Samantha was beating on the glass, trying anything to get his attention, and briefly looked to her, seeing the worry in her face. She then raised her fists, like she would do for boxing. She hoped he would get the message. Halo panted, frowning a bit at the gesture, though when another flurry of swipes came for him, he did what Samantha would do; He started bobbing and weaving, always keeping his feet moving. J'Kress roared, throwing one of his most powerful punches, only to strike nothing but air. Halo was already to the side of him, winding up and striking J'Kress powerfully in the abdomen.

Some of the marines cheered at the blow, watching as Halo wound up and got some really good shots in, enough to make the gold Elite stumble, approaching the glass closer and closer. The two swerved and weaved as best as they could, Halo's combat instinct coming back, and Samantha noticed a change in him, that desire of any Covenant soldier to win whatever battle they were in, despite the cost. Panda fiddled with a few more wires as the two Elites beat the tar out of each other, getting shocked one more time, but this time the blast door lifted slightly, Samantha looking at the sides of the doors before turning to Panda.

"Hurry Panda," she said urgently, turning back to see Halo being rammed into the glass, causing her to shriek a bit.

Halo turned his head, suddenly ducking it as a fist flew over his shoulders, and impacted against the glass, leaving a slight splatter of purple blood. Halo simply twisted his body, using his hips to deliver a powerful roundhouse kick to the gold's back, forcing him against the glass. In that moment of gathering his bearings, Halo grabbed him by the back of his neck, slamming his fist into J'Kress side, before winding up and striking his elbow against the back of the gold Elite's head. Blood streaked down the glass as J'Kress fell to his knees, coughing up blood before bracing himself against the door. Halo simply stood where he was, bleeding from his mouth as well, his hands raised and his fists clenched so tightly, it was like they were mallets.

A roar filled the air, Halo rushing up to the Gold, winding up for what could have been the final blow. A flash of blue light filled the air, Halo stumbling into the glass and holding his abdomen, a long

cut showing on his armor, and soon a few trickles of blood. J'Kress brandished the plasma saber he had at his hip, drawing his hand back while the tip pointed at his enemy. He hissed deeply, gathering his breath while Halo simply grunted and whined in pain. Samantha just watched in horror, a tear falling down her face.

"Now the end!" J'Kress screamed, lunging at Halo, lifting the sword as he brought it down.

Halo managed to avoid a lethal blow, though the very tip cut diagonally from shoulder to hip, stumbling forward and bracing himself on a Warthog. He gasped for breath, the pain at his back now flooding his mind, while J'Kress took his time, stalking his prey as he moved at his leisure towards Halo. He couldn't outright kill him. It was the second priority of his mission, to bring Halo back to the Elders.

"You've fought well, Halo," J'Kress spoke, letting his arm down to relax the blade, "but come now. We both know who the victor of this battle is."

"Part of... the mission... letting me... live?" Halo growled, spitting up a bit more blood as he turned around, leaning his back against the vehicle.

"Yes. When you are returned, and this ship destroyed, it will look like just any other attack on a Human ship. Though the next infiltration of a few chosen Human vessels, will be able to go without a hitch, thanks to the data you had managed to supply us with. The Elders wish to thank you personally. And I wish to thank all of the Human's personally by sending them to their next life," he growled, reaching into his pouch, fishing out a disk like object before showing Halo what he held, "I have begun the countdown ten minutes go. In five minutes time, charges placed on the engine's coolant lines will blow, sending a cloud of gas through the ship. Every Human here will die," he grinned widely, dropping the remote to the ground. Halo just panted slowly, leaning further back against the warthog. He needed some time to recover, and the marines, all of them were overly concerned. Those coolant lines ran a long way through the ship, and once the gases got into the ventilation ducts, it would soon start to suffocate everyone on board, "and when the engines can't maintain a cool operating temperature, a meltdown is inevitable."

Halo frowned slowly, trying to move, but that burning. It was too much. J'Kress smiled slowly, raising his weapon again, then spotted Halo's outstretched arm. That's a good place to start, he said, tensing in preparation to lop his arm off. Until the sound of rapid clicks and a whirring was heard from behind him. He slowly turned, spotting the Captain, climbing onto the back of a Warthog and activating the three barreled cannon.

"Mother fucker," she hissed, the barrels coming alive and spitting metal. Halo dived out of the way, while J'Kress dashed to the side, avoiding the bullets as he reached into his pack. The Captain followed J'Kress with the cannon, the sounds of gunfire filling the Bay completely, her complete rage being poured through every revolution of the barrel's.

In her blind moment of victory, she neglected to spot the sticky



grenade bouncing towards her, though stop a ways in front of her. The grenade exploded, the blast of light and heat obscuring her vision and causing her to cover her face, giving J'Kress enough time to rush up to the warthog, jumping into the air. He swiped the sword, cutting through the gun, but producing a very interesting Human scream. Anderson fell from the back of the vehicle, clutching her face, especially the right eye before crumpling into a ball as the searing pain threatened to knock her out.

J'Kress growled a bit, raising the sword to finish her off, though cried out loudly as Halo sprang out of no where, tackling the gold Elite to the ground, then quickly straddled his waist, his knuckles landing across the side of J'Kress' face, one after the other with his strongest hand. The other did its best to hold J'Kress's hand out of the way, and the saber clutched in it while the gold Elite struggled.

"Come on! Get that bastard!" Samantha shouted, banging on the glass as the marines started to cheer after hearing that. Slowly at first, but soon reaching a fevered pitch. The Captain raised her head slowly, a shaking mess, and heard the dull bangs on the glass, the faint sounds of her crew cheering for the Covenant making her heart rate speed up considerably. Wow, was the only thing she could think of, hearing such support.

Halo raised his fist back once more, spreading his jaws as he roared. His eyes went wide as J'Kress caught his fist, squeezing it tightly while the two struggled on the floor. J'Kress, his face numb with pain, growled and arched his back, slamming his forehead into Halo's face. He fell back, whimpering loudly from the impact, getting to his feet, and stepping back at a snail's pace. He didn't want to admit it to himself, but he was exhausted, beat down, and at the last strings of his life. He could already feel his resolve fading to stay in this world, fighting the urge to close his eyes. J'Kress felt the same way, after the beatings he had received, but he still had the sword, which he raised into air. He stalked menacingly, glaring at his prize.

"M-Monster," the Captain whimpered, clutching her face as she bared her teeth at the Elite, hoping to attract his attention away from Halo.

J'Kress didn't take his eyes off of his target, speaking in a low voice, "Monster.... Tell me, Captain. Just how many children died screaming for the Spartan-II project?" he asked, glancing to a paled Captain, "only you Humans...."

The marines all went silent. Halo's legs shook before he fell to one knee, blood dripping freely from his mouth as he closed his eyes, thinking about the marines. They knew it was the end for Halo, while some of them prayed for him to be granted a quick and painless death. Panda, seeing Samantha's concern, worked even more quickly, managing to lift the door another few inches. Any one of them could have stuck their fingers into the bay under the crack. Even the Sarge nodded grimly, wishing the best for Halo.

>"You fought well, son. May God be with you," he spoke deeply, saluting.<p>

The moment of silence was soon interrupted with the loud brushes of clothing, everyone saluting at once... all except Samantha, who

started hitting the glass hard enough to draw blood from her hands.

>"Halo!" she screamed, banging harder, "Halo! Don't you leave me Halo!"<p>

Her screams of anguish seemed to hit everyone hard. The toughest of the marines around fought the urge to let a few tears out, the Sarge included. He never witnessed anyone so brave in combat before, and the realization of this monster fighting with everything he had for /them/. Before, a sworn enemy, and now, Halo was truly one of them. J'Kress just moved closer, chuckling deeply as Halo seemed to be losing the fight to even keep himself supported.

"Halo!" Samantha resumed her screaming, weakly banging on the glass once more as she sunk to her knees, her tears flowing freely down her cheeks as she clenched her eyes shut. She couldn't bare to see what would happen to Halo.

"Don't leave me, Halo." she whimpered, covering her mouth with her hand.

Halo closed his eyes, hearing Samantha's screams, his breathing heavy and forced, waiting for the first of many blows that would sever his limbs clean off.

"For the Gods..." J'Kress spoke, winding up and bringing the sword down.

For the Humans, Halo thought, a tear falling down his face as he opened his eyes, "For the right, "he growled, lifting his head as he lifted his knee crouching back as he pushed his legs with all of his strength as his enemy brought the saber down. He twisted his body to the side, catching the Gold's arm then landing a powerful blow to his hand, sending the saber high into the air. J'Kress stood shocked at the last bit of energy Halo had, his mouth parting slowly as he stared at his once comrades angered face, not even seeing the blow come to his knee. A loud crack filled the Bay, followed by an ear piercing, inhuman scream of pain as his knee was completely shattered.

Halo reached forward accompanied by a loud growl, grabbing the Gold's neck as he held his head in the ideal position so he could see the sword coming down. J'Kress could only stare at the weapon, dumbfounded as it seemed to hand over his head. The sword plunged into his face as Halo quickly pulled his hand back. J'Kress didn't make a single noise, lifting his hand, his fingers contorted and gripping at the air as the blade of the sword was lodged into his face. His body convulsed a few times, the last bit of his own body's impulses firing their last times. J'Kress remained on his knees for what felt like eternity before his lifeless body fell over to the side.

Everyone just watched quietly, the marines slowly lowering their hands to the sides, while Samantha lifted her gaze, watching as the limp Elite body slumped to the floor.

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"Kraa'ander, do you think we'll ever become Elder's ourselves?"

Kraa turned to his friend, then shrugged innocently, "Only the Gods know that, J'Kress." he replied.

"Let's try to gain the Elder's favor then, alright?"

"Heh. Alright."

"Have a plan?"

"Yes... I think I do have one."

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Halo lifted the control module up, staring at the face of it while his legs shook and strained to keep him upright. He stumbled a bit, frowning as he shook his head slightly before focusing on the detonator. His eyes wandered over the smooth black surface of it, raising his thumb then pressed the button with a minute left on the timer. The Humans were safe. He had done his job, and Samantha.... He closed his eyes, falling to his knees as he smelled the natural air of the planet coming through the opening to the lift. It was stuck at the bottom, and while he was afraid of heights, right now he didn't care. He simply fell forward, his arm falling over the edge, as the remote plummeted to the ground.

Katrina was simply in shock after witnessing the entire scene, her sensors picking up that most of everyone, Covenant included witnessed the scene, and everyone was silent. It was ghostly. Two races intent on destroying each other, suddenly brought together in one defining moment between the two. She then remembered the marines, and noticed they were trying to open the blast doors.

"Curse my Human behavior," she spoke to herself, accessing the computers.

Samantha moved back as the blast doors started to slowly open, their whirring filling the hallway as she witnessed Halo's body starting to slump off of the edge of the lift. Come on, come on, she tried to will the doors faster, before ducking down, shimmying under the door quickly, and then getting to her feet. She sprinted towards Halo, watching him slip even more before jumping into the air in a drop kick fashion. One of her hands grabbed Halo's wrist before it had a chance to start falling with Halo's body, her other hand grabbing the edge of the lift as the both of them disappeared over the edge. She held on as tight as she could, the limp Covenant dangling from her hand.

"Somebody help me!!!" she screamed, feeling the wounds from the needles tearing open, blood trickling down her arm, and soon around her hand, making it even more hard to hold onto Halo, "please God...."

She gritted her teeth, holding on more tightly, feeling her fingers start to bleed. With a loud grunt, she held on tighter, feeling her grip loosening on Halo, and her fingers starting to grab less and less of the edge. A hand flew over the side of the edge, grabbing her wrist and another, and another. She was quickly pulled up, trying her hardest, or God damn her if she let go of Halo. Soon both of them were pulled to safety, while a large group of capable marines started to storm the ship, eliminating every last Covenant on board. All but

one.

Everyone was screaming for medics, one of them tearing open Samantha's shirt, examining the wounds the Needler from before gave her and had just opened, spilling blood all over the place. She turned her head to the side, staring at Halo, then slowly took his hand, squeezing it gently She couldn't help but burst into tears when she felt a weak squeeze from his hand.

### 13. Chapter 13

The artificial ring orbiting the gas giant known as Threshold, had been destroyed. The news came a mere day after the Raven's Night landed upon the planet Reach. Unsurprisingly, the Covenant had also heard the news. While the Humans cheered and rejoiced, putting aside all those emotions and feelings from their losses, and were unified in that single moment of relief and praise for everyone involved with the destruction of a powerful weapon. The soldiers that died on the artificial ring, were named heroes. On the Covenant side, it was a different story. No words of the Flood, or the possible destruction of both races and all life in the universe, were spoken about the artificial ring. The Elder's, in all of their wisdom, decided to keep this part out, and only tell the Covenant the other bad news to encourage the troops to fight harder and more aggressively. They could not simply say they made a mistake. However, the shock of the news, upon reaching planet Farther Star and the dozen war ships, the Covenant forces suffered a great blow in their morale. The tables slowly but surely turned on them, despite their strength in numbers.

Captain Anderson spent the next few days screaming orders over the UNSC Network, the reinforcements arriving an hour before the Covenant had a chance to engage the Raven's Night, and all of its crew. Fortunately she still had good vision with her single eye, and even with her leg in a cast, it didn't slow her down one bit. With expert planning, the Covenant forces were wiped out, but in a last hoorah, they detonated their ships, choosing to go out in a blaze of glory than risk their enemy finding out the location to their home world. The blast itself destroyed many Human vessels and killed countless marines. It was acts such as this which drove the Captain. Her every breath would be devoted to winning this war.

She soon became feared by many Covenants; The one Captain that could lose something as important as an eye, and then use that loss to be even more aggressive. Captain Anderson, was soon a name to be respected and feared.

Of the very few Covenant that were captured, at least two of them was a medic, one Grunt, and one Elite. The two of them were both forced to treat the injured halo, and forced they were indeed. A metal cord was each around their necks, tight but not choking. The lines were tied to a sort of winch bolted to the ceiling, and holding the controls to wind the winch and hang the medics, was the Captain. Captain Anderson made it real clear that if any of them tried anything funny, they would both be gutted very, very slowly. Scared to death of the threat, especially from her, they set to work, the fear only sinking in further when she slammed a very wicked, and equally as sharp looking blade on a nearby table. When they were done, the Grunt, trying to impress his commander, tried to stab a

scalpel into Halo's heart. He was dead before he lowered his hand to stab the injured Covenant. The Elite was simply in horror, seeing the Grunt hanging from the ceiling and a mass of blood pouring down his legs. The Captain only smirked when she heard the Elite took his own life not even an hour later.

Halo, on the other hand, was treated very well, and his recovery was well on its way. When his eyes opened, doctors rushed to make sure he was comfortable, and getting him anything that he wanted. Ice cream, he found out, really was the miracle feel good food of any patient after surgery. He was already up after just a day of solid rest and healing, though he was very weak, and could hardly walk on his own. Samantha, unfortunately, was still asleep. He found out later that she was in some sort of coma. The Needler had done more damage than anyone thought; apparently these needles were coated in a type of biological agent that no one had a cure for, at least, no one Human. It was something that Halo even wasn't aware of. The doctors couldn't do anything about it at this point. When Halo heard the news, and even though it pained him to even sit up, he sat in the chair next to her bed for three days straight, not moving a muscle, and praying to his Gods for her life.

Today was no different. He was staring at her, holding onto her hand tightly as he listened to her heart beat through the machine next to her. He closed his eyes, his prayers never ceasing, not even when he heard a knock at the door. He lifted his head, seeing Panda walk in, holding something. He smiled half heartedly, before walking up to Samantha, rubbing her other hand before he lowered his gaze.

"I just wanted you to know... I'm sorry." he spoke, his voice choked as he turned to Halo.

He nodded slowly, accepting the condolences, then closed his eyes again, returning to his prayers, being strong for the both of them. Panda sighed softly, looking her over. She looked so peaceful, laying next to Halo, and him holding her hand.

"You love her, don't you?" he asked quietly, watching the Covenant lift his head as a tear rolled down his cheek.

Panda nodded shakily, lowering his gaze once more.

"I'm glad... she... she deserves you," he whispered.

He was going to tell Halo how everyone on the Raven's Night was keeping his involvement a secret about what had happened here. The official story was: on route to planet Reach, they were ambushed and forced to make a crash landing. They managed to fend off the Covenant until support arrived. It was a lie involving the hundreds of remaining members of the Captains crew that would have made any governed nation proud.

"Oh, I umm... have something for you," he spoke, fidgeting with the object in his hands, then offered it to Halo, "I think she would like for you to have this."

Halo took it. It was a book, a very old book, and he looked at the title of it. The Holy Bible. He took in a long breath, closing his eyes again before he dipped his head in a bow. Panda just patted his leg a bit, not knowing what else to say, then squeezed Samantha's

wrist again, deciding to leave the two of them alone again. Halo took his hand from Samantha's, opening the book in his hands, then stared at the words. He flipped through the pages, noticing a place marker, then turned to that page. One passage was highlighted, and he studied it. He squeezed Samantha's hand once more, taking in a long breath.

"Though I walk... through the valley of the shadow of death.... I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff... they comfort me."

He lifted his head, closing the book as he turned to face Samantha. Her eyes were open, and she stared at Halo, with a gentle smile before he leaned in closer. He smiled a bit as well, placing the Good Book by her side, then rubbed her hand gently.

"I'm glad to see that you're alright," she whispered, closing her eyes as she squeezed his hand gently.

Halo dipped his head gently. To be honest, he had felt a lot better, but he wasn't about to say anything to Samantha. He just squeezed her hand and leaned closer.

"I'm glad I get to see you one last time," she whispered, watching him place a hand on her chest.

"Samantha," he growled, tilting his head a bit, then watched as she placed her hand to his chest.

"I love you," she whispered, taking in a long breath, watching him draw closer.

"I... love you too," he growled, moving a bit closer.

She felt his breath on her face as he moved even closer, her lips touching his for a long moment before the two parted. She opened her eyes again, rubbing his armor less chest as she smiled weakly. Halo took in a sharp breath, feeling her heart start to slow, and streaks of warmth begin to travel down his face.

"Do not cry," she whispered, sighing softly as a few of her own tears trickled down her face.

Halo lowered his gaze slowly, closing his eyes as he felt his breath come to him in gasps, "Thank you... for showing me a new faith."

"No... thank you, for returning mine," she whispered and smiled faintly, "Angel's Halo."

Halo tilted his head slowly, his eyes closing as he rubbed her chest gently, "My name...," he growled, understanding the 'Halo' part now.

She closed her eyes, nodding her head gently, rubbing his chest a bit more, "I will see you again," she whispered, her breath slowing, her hand slipping from Halo's chest. Halo took in a long breath, lifting his head as he felt the tears streak down his face. He slowly stood, taking the book in one hand, then swayed his free arm, bowing respectfully to Samantha before closing the door on the way

out.

Captain Anderson was standing on the bridge of her ship, talking with Katrina, and happily to do so, when the lift doors opened. Halo walked in, holding the book tightly in his hand, trying to stand tall and proud, given his injuries, and walked behind Anderson. Katrina noticed him first, the Captain turning around shortly, then looked up at his face, noticing the wet marks. He didn't even have to say anything. She nodded slowly in understanding, moving closer to him as she lowered her head. Katrina looked away briefly, watching the two, and several others began to hear the unspoken words pass through the bridge. Everyone was silent for a long time, the Captain sniffing a bit. She wasn't as religious as she should be, yet she spent the last three nights praying to God that Halo and Samantha would be together. Perhaps this was God's will, or perhaps a sick joke. She didn't know what to think of Him now.

Halo lowered his head once more, turning, and headed back to the lift. He clutched the book tightly to his chest, the doors opening at his presence, before he stepped in. The walk to his barracks was a long one, everyone he passed giving a solemn nod. Again, he tried his best to stand tall, but everyone he passed by, knowing they wouldn't have heard the news yet, and didn't want to appear weak in front of anyone. He knew he had done something that no one could have thought possible. He was the first to create acceptance between Humans and Covenant. But the cost... was it too high of a price to pay? Trying to look strong, failed him. He passed by several Humans that looked at him concern when his tears fell freely down his face. He just locked himself in his barracks.

Samantha's funeral was arranged a few days after. The necessary repairs to the ship were under way, and soon they would be able to head back into space. For their service to mankind, those that wanted to return to Earth, were granted so, and the Raven's Night would soon be making its final trip back to home. The repairs gave them enough time to hold this small ritual for Samantha. She would be buried amongst the highest spot of the terrain, so she could always over look the beauty of the sun setting across the lands. The entire crew attended the decidedly Covenant Farewell, dressed in their finest uniforms. Samantha was wrapped in cloth, her body being carried to her final resting place, and behind, a weakened though determined Covenant trailing behind the six of them. He tried his best to make his armor look at its finest, polished painstakingly, yet covered in the scars of battle.

Everyone saluted the paul bearers as they walked by, Halo holding onto Samantha's bible tightly. When she was laid in her final resting place, dirt was placed over her, while Halo placed his hands together, closing his eyes before falling to his knees. His voice was deep and guttural, speaking of his Gods and their Last Rites in the Covenant language.

Captain Anderson stepped back, raising her hand into a salute for Samantha, though looked at Halo with a look of concern as he swayed a bit. He hadn't eaten or slept for the last five days, and it showed. When Halo finished the Rites, he stood, bowing his head deeply in respect as everyone took a long moment of silence. Even Katrina was here for the ceremony, her hand by her forehead, staring at the grave. The Captain lowered her hand, everyone else following suit, and slowly everyone started to head back to the ship, no one making a

sound. It was Covenant custom to praise their fallen in silence, only the sounds of nature allowed to speak their sorrow. The Captain continued to stare at the grave, while Panda looked to Halo. He nodded slowly, patting metal covered arm gently, then turned away and made the long walk back to the ship. Anderson simply turned to Halo, her gaze meeting his, her head nodding slowly before she patted his back.

"I am sorry you do not wish to come with us. I was hoping you would get a chance to see Samantha's home one day." she whispered.

Halo lowered his head, taking in a short breath, then looked to the setting sun, the golden glows flowing over the hills and the rivers, causing him to force a small smile.

"I think... she has found a good home." he growled.

The Captain nodded slowly, parting her mouth a bit as she tried to hold back her sorrow. She took in a long breath and closed her eyes.

"That Elite... he was right, wasn't he? About this being your idea?" she asked, looking back up at Halo with questioning eyes.

Halo simply closed his eyes, thinking about that before he frowned, "I... honestly don't remember. But... it should not matter. I am grateful fate led me down this path."

Anderson smiled a bit, nodding in agreement before she looked down to where Samantha lay.

"If this ever comes up... about you and Samantha... and being on my ship..." she spoke quietly.

"I understand... you do not know me." he growled softly.

She just frowned at that, "I'll burn in hell before I ever say something like that," she spoke and raised her gaze to meet his, staring into his black, surprised eyes, "if this comes up, I'll tell the story true."

Halo just nodded slowly, taking in a long breath before he watched the Captain offer him a hand. He gently took it, shaking hands with her before she turned her gaze away. He smiled a bit, then reached into his pack, placing something in her hand. It was a book of matches and two of her cigars. She looked back up to him, smiling a bit as she took them. She chuckled a bit, then lifted one up and placed it in Halo's mouth, striking a match later.

"Human custom to smoke a cigar," she whispered.

She just chuckled when he tried to inhale some smoke and started coughing slightly. But Halo didn't want to offend her by not accepting it. The Captain lit her own cigar, puffing on it gently before letting a stream of smoke escape her lips. She and the Covenant was quiet. So quiet they both could almost hear the grass bending with the wind. Halo merely stared at the valleys before him and the setting sun, while the Captain closed her eye and took in a long breath. She nodded slowly, her head lowering before she turned on her heel and made the long walk back to the drop ship. A soft



sound of the Covenant caused her to stop and look back to see Halo turning towards her.

"May the... Gods... take care of you." he growled, bowing low.

The Captain turned completely to face him, closing her eye before she placed her feet together and lifted her hand for a salute, "And may the Gods take care of you." she choked, turning on her heel once more to head back to the ship.

Halo turned back to the grave, kneeling before it as he closed his eyes. He removed his helmet, placing it on the soil before he laid down, taking in slow breaths as he felt a wave of calm wash over him. He stroked the book, finding comfort in the act, his breathing slowing a little each time. The clouds floated in front of the sun, sending streaks of light across the sky, meeting Covenant eyes, as though it was for Samantha and him. He stared at the beams of light for a long while, until the sun was almost set. When it was almost out of view, he closed his eyes and sighed ever so softly.

Captain Anderson stared at the stars through the window on the bridge, her hands behind her back as she thought about the events that transpired on this very ship. Lost in her thought, she didn't notice Panda walking up behind her, holding a bundle. He cleared his throat, and she turned around, looking to him and the bundle.

"Halo... wanted me to give you this when we were star bound, Captain." he spoke, offering her the bundle of cloth.

It was Samantha's shirt of her uniform, folded neatly, and inside, was something hard. The Captain opened the shirt, reaching inside the pocket, and stared at the identification that rested on an Elite's armor. Where the name was blank before, held simple scratches. She turned it over, smiling a bit upon seeing a message.

"Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord," she turned it over, looking at the name scratched into the front, "A. Halo."

She lifted her head, wiping her eye slowly as she stared to the stars, the shirt and the plate being placed on the console. She took in a long breath, a soft smile coming to her lips as she glanced about the stars, a beauty to her that she had never taken the time to really see for what it was. Her gaze then looked to the comet soaring through space, staring at the white tail of the large chunk of rock. She slowly lifted her cigar to her mouth, placing it in her lips as she lit the end. She smiled. Everyone on the Raven's Night, would call Halo a respected soldier.

Alexis would call him a hero.

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Halo stood amidst a clouded sky, pillars of light shining in all directions before he turned around, his gaze searching around in confusion. Looking forward once again, he saw something. Samantha was there, smiling warmly at him. She was bathed in a warm light, her hair looking as though it was truly on fire as she walked up to him.

"Hi there." she spoke sweetly, holding still when he touched her face, cringing a bit and giggling, "your hands are cold."

He just smiled and slid his fingers down her cheek.

"Come on, we're going to be late."

"Where are we going?" he asked, feeling her take his hand and sway a bit on her feet.

"I don't know." she spoke coyly, then grinned as she looked into his eyes, "Let's find out together, okay?" she asked, squeezing his hand tightly.

He smiled widely, staring into her eyes for the longest time, as though he could do that until the end of time.

End  
file.